

Umaru, V 2024, 'Contemporary Trends and Developments in Pentateuchal Studies', *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1-28

Contemporary Trends and Developments in Pentateuchal Studies

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Abstract

The Pentateuch is a foundational cornerstone within biblical literature, encapsulating a mosaic of historical narratives, legal codes, and theological reflections. This paper presents a vibrant and evolving landscape of contemporary Pentateuchal studies aimed at unravelling its complexities and exploring its multidimensional facets. The study elucidates the challenges and gaps in current Pentateuchal scholarship. It identifies the pressing need to reconcile diverse methodologies, harmonize contradictory theories, and integrate interdisciplinary approaches. Additionally, it addresses the imperative to comprehend the Pentateuch within its socio-cultural context, considering its reception history and relevance in modern academic discourses. To address these challenges, this paper engages in a comprehensive analysis of emerging trends within Pentateuchal studies. It navigates through the evolution of methodologies, from traditional source criticism to contemporary literary and narrative analyses, highlighting the interplay between form, genre, and redactional layers within the Pentateuch. Furthermore, it examines the burgeoning influence of interdisciplinary frameworks, encompassing post-colonialism, feminist criticism, and ecological hermeneutics, which offer new perspectives on the Pentateuch's implications for contemporary societal issues. This study endeavours to synthesize a more holistic understanding of the Pentateuch by meticulously exploring these diverse perspectives. It aims to bridge scholarly divides, reconcile interpretative conflicts, and shed light on the Pentateuch's socio-cultural significance; considering the dynamic interaction between historical contexts and modern

interpretations, it seeks to elucidate the enduring relevance of the Pentateuch in shaping ethical, cultural, and theological discourses. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse within biblical scholarship by providing a comprehensive framework amalgamating diverse methodologies and perspectives. It underscores the need for continued exploration and engagement with the Pentateuch, acknowledging its profound impact on ancient civilizations and its enduring relevance in contemporary societies.

Introduction

The field of Pentateuchal studies is constantly evolving, utilizing various methodologies and approaches to understand the foundational biblical texts. The Pentateuch is central to the religious, cultural, and historical understanding of Judaism and Christianity. This study explores the evolving nature of Pentateuchal studies, focusing on paradigms, methodologies, theories, archaeological findings, comparative studies, contemporary trends, methodological diversity, and connections between Pentateuchal studies and other disciplines.

The study employs a literature review approach to examine and analyze scholarly literature on a particular topic, aiding in understanding the subject's history, identifying research gaps, and incorporating them into various forms of writing. The main focus is on the Documentary Hypothesis proposed by Julius Wellhausen in the nineteenth century, which suggests that the Pentateuch was composed by multiple authors over several centuries. Contemporary scholars continue to explore and refine this hypothesis, often using insights from archaeology, comparative ancient Near Eastern literature, and linguistics. According to Gertz et al,

In Israeli scholarship, the Documentary Hypothesis in one or another of its classical forms continues to be highly esteemed. Some scholars working at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in particular see the future of pentateuchal scholarship in the refinement rather than the abandonment of the sources J, E, P, and D for the reconstruction of the compositional history of the Pentateuch. (2016:3)

Despite extensive scholarly engagement, contemporary Pentateuchal studies face persistent challenges in reconciling diverse methodologies and theories, integrating interdisciplinary approaches, and addressing evolving societal perspectives. Gaps persist in understanding the text's socio-cultural context, reception history, and relevance to modern ethical and social discourses. This paper aims to critically examine these challenges, gaps, and emerging trends within Pentateuchal studies, providing a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape and charting a course for future scholarship in this dynamic field.

Historical Overview of Pentateuchal Studies

Pentateuchal studies have a long history that dates back to early Christian and ancient Jewish traditions. These texts were revered and regarded as authoritative, with interpretations frequently emphasizing historical narratives, metaphorical interpretations, and religious and moral lessons. Jewish scholars developed exegetical methods, such as Midrash (Plaut 1981:xxvii), to explore the deeper meanings of the text. Like Rashi's, Jewish comments from the medieval era analysed the text using language study, historical context, and religious interpretation.¹ Scholars started analysing biblical texts using critical methodologies during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, starting with Spinoza (2007), challenging traditional authorship and interpretation.

¹ Rashi, also known as Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, was a medieval French rabbi and scholar from 1040 to 1105. He is renowned for his comprehensive commentaries on the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), particularly on the Torah (the first five books). Rashi's commentary is highly esteemed in both Jewish religious and scholarly circles. His approach to biblical interpretation involved linguistic, historical, and religious analysis. Key aspects of his methodology included word definitions, linguistic nuances, historical context, contemporary events, religious interpretation, and accessibility. Rashi drew upon Midrashic traditions, highlighting moral and ethical lessons and theological emphasis. His commentaries aimed to make the biblical text accessible to a broad audience, making it a foundational work in Jewish biblical scholarship. His ability to blend linguistic precision, historical awareness, and religious sensitivity has contributed to the enduring relevance of his commentaries in the study of the Hebrew Bible (jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

The historical-critical method was developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Law 2012:25-68). It became popular in biblical studies when scholars like Julius Wellhausen proposed the Documentary Hypothesis, which claimed that the Pentateuch comprised several sources (Nicholson 1998:3-4; Friedman 1987a). This theory generated discussion and advanced research on the Pentateuch's textual origins and redaction. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century archaeological findings shed light on the historical setting of the Pentateuch, with findings from Mesopotamia and Egypt illuminating the social and cultural contexts. Pentateuchal studies have progressed with methods like form criticism (Blenkinsopp 1992), structuralism, literary analysis (Baden 2020:1-3), social scientific research (Matthews and Moyer 2015), feminism (Benjamin 2015), post-colonial readings (West and Dube 2000; De La Torre 2013), and post-colonial perspectives (Moore and Segovia 2005). They looked at issues including religious and social importance, the development of the Israelite identity, and its connections to other ancient Near Eastern literature. Studies of the Pentateuch are evolving due to the emergence of new methods, including presenting scholarly study to comprehend the work's structure, theology, and contemporary significance. A long tradition of interpretation and study has formed this vibrant topic, sparking continuing discussions and discoveries.

The Documentary Hypothesis: Past and Present Debates

The Documentary Hypothesis, also known as the Wellhausen Hypothesis, is a nineteenth-century theory in biblical scholarship that aims to explain the composition of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Pentateuch or Torah (Nicholson 1998:3-4). It was formulated after scholars noticed inconsistencies, repetitions, and variations in style, vocabulary, and theological themes within the Pentateuch. This led to questions about its authorship and composition. According to a renowned Jewish scholar, Rabbi Zev Farber (2014), early observations by scholars like Jean Astruc and Johann Eichhorn in the eighteenth century suggested multiple sources for using different divine names in Genesis. This hypothesis has significantly influenced biblical studies. In his classic work, Cassuto (2005) critiques the Documentary Hypothesis, which posits multiple sources for the Pentateuch and offers an alternative perspective. He argues for the unity and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch,

making it a fundamental text for understanding the history of Pentateuchal studies.

According to Friedman (1987b:15-32), predecessors to the Documentary Hypothesis included scholars like Thomas Hobbes, Isaac de la Peyrère, Benedict de Spinoza, and Richard Simon, who suggested multiple authors. However, these ideas did not gain widespread acceptance. According to Baden (2012:13-33; see also Nihan 2010), the nineteenth century saw the development of the Documentary Hypothesis, influenced by Jean Astruc, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, and Wilhelm de Wette. Nicholson (1998:7-20) posits that Julius Wellhausen, the most influential proponent of the hypothesis, refined and popularized the theory in the late nineteenth century that the Pentateuch did not have a single author but was the result of a complex process of composition over several centuries. Wellhausen identified four primary source documents: J (the Yahwist), E (the Elohist), D (the Deuteronomist), and P (the Priestly source). These sources differed in divine names, writing styles, theological emphases, and historical contexts. Wellhausen's work popularized source criticism, a method of analysing biblical texts to identify and separate different source documents. This approach helped explain many textual inconsistencies and repetitions in the Pentateuch, highlighting the importance of source criticism in biblical text analysis.

Scholars like Baden (2012:45-81) challenge traditional Documentary Hypothesis theories and provide a fresh perspective on the composition of the Pentateuch. Baden engages with contemporary debates surrounding the authorship and development of these texts. Despite criticism and alternative hypotheses, it remains a foundational framework for understanding the composition of the Pentateuch. The theory also considers ancient Israel's historical and cultural context when studying the development of sources and their redaction into the Pentateuch.

Scholars have raised several challenges to and critiques of the Documentary Hypothesis, including redaction criticism (Dozeman and Schmid 2011), alternative theories like the Supplementary Hypothesis (Wevers 1970), and archaeological and historical challenges (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:4-24). Monika Bajić (2016:215-223) and John Van Seters (1999:24-27) critically examine the Documentary Hypothesis, questioning its assumptions and

proposing a different approach to understanding the composition of the Pentateuch, often referred to as the ‘Supplementary Hypothesis’² or the ‘Neo-Supplementary Hypothesis’. Van Seters (1999:24-27) argues that the Pentateuch was compiled much later than the Documentary Hypothesis suggests. Therefore, the final composition of the Pentateuch likely occurred during or after the Babylonian exile (sixth century BCE) rather than during the time of Moses or earlier. Unlike the Documentary Hypothesis, which posits multiple authors (J, E, D, and P), there is the possibility of a single editor or compiler who integrated various sources and traditions to create the Pentateuch as it is known. Van Seters emphasizes the role of redaction and editorial activity in shaping the text. He suggests that the editor(s) were responsible for harmonizing and editing diverse sources, including older traditions, legal materials, and narratives. While acknowledging the presence of diverse sources, Van Seters opines that there is a thematic unity in the Pentateuch, and the final editor(s) worked to create a coherent narrative with theological and literary significance (1999:25-27).

Pentateuchal studies have evolved in recent decades, incorporating insights from archaeology (Levy and Higham 2005), anthropology, and other fields. Scholars like Friedman (2003) and Hagedorn (2007:53-58) continue to defend the Documentary Hypothesis, while others, like Tigay (1985; see also Tov 2001), are concerned about a new model for understanding the composition of the Pentateuch. The study of the Pentateuch and its validity remains a dynamic field with ongoing debates. In the mid-twentieth century, scholars reevaluated the Documentary Hypothesis, developing post-documentary paradigms in Pentateuchal studies. These include the Supplementary Hypothesis developed by Hermann Gunkel (Bajić 2016:215-223; Wevers 1970), which acknowledged additional layers of editing and revision beyond the four primary sources, as supplementary documents and expansions were essential components of the

² According to Bajić (2016:217-218), citing Arnold (2003:624), Georg Heinrich August von Ewald proposed a new method commonly named Supplementary Hypothesis (SH). The premise of his theory is ‘a single core E document was supplemented by J and strands from the book of Deuteronomy’.

Pentateuchal text,³ adding to its meaning and understanding (Nihan 2010). Also, the Fragmentary Hypothesis, proposed by scholars like Gerhard von Rad (1966) and Rolf Rendtorff (1990), suggested that the Pentateuchal text was a compilation of smaller, independent fragments, often characterized by unique theological or thematic emphases, brought together over time, challenging the neat division of the text into discrete sources.

Scholars have increasingly focused on the role of editors and redactors in shaping the Pentateuch, focusing on their theological and ideological agendas with canonical criticism that views the Pentateuch as a finished product within the context of the Jewish and Christian canons, focusing on its function within religious communities for teaching, worship, and identity formation (Sailhamer 1995). Baden (2020:3; see also Alter 2010) has adopted literary methods to analyse the Pentateuch's narrative structure, themes, and motifs, often focusing on the literary devices used by the authors and editors. However, these post-documentary paradigms do not represent a unified perspective, as scholars within each paradigm have different views and interpretations. Pentateuchal studies remain dynamic and evolving, contributing to a richer understanding of the composition and meaning of the Pentateuch within its historical and cultural context.

Challenge of Current Pentateuchal Scholarship

Current Pentateuchal scholarship faces several persistent challenges and notable gaps that hinder a comprehensive understanding of this foundational

³ The Supplementary Hypothesis, attributed to Hermann Gunkel, represents a development in Pentateuchal studies in the mid-twentieth century. This hypothesis acknowledges additional layers of editing and revision beyond the four primary sources proposed by the Documentary Hypothesis. According to this view, supplementary documents and expansions were considered essential components of the Pentateuchal text. Scholars who adhere to the Supplementary Hypothesis argue that the text underwent further editing and addition after incorporating the primary sources. The idea is that various editors or redactors contributed additional material to the existing sources, enriching the Pentateuchal text and adding layers of meaning and understanding. This approach recognizes the complexity and fluidity of the compositional process, suggesting that the text evolved over time through the incorporation of various literary elements.

text within biblical studies. These challenges arise from methodological limitations, interpretative conflicts, and gaps in historical context, among other factors.

The analysis of the Pentateuch faces challenges due to the divergence of methodologies used. Traditional methods like source, form, and redaction criticism often lead to conflicting conclusions, resulting in interpretive impasses rather than consensus. Integrating these methodologies remains challenging, often resulting in interpretive discrepancies and impasses. For instance, Johannes P. Floss (2006) has critically discussed these three 'traditional methods'. Source criticism identifies distinct sources, but it leaves subjective boundaries, while form criticism classifies units without consensus and redaction criticism investigates editing and editorial work, but often leads to conflicting conclusions (Floss 2006). Integration challenges include overlap and contradiction, hindering comprehensive analysis. Interpretive impasses arise from conflicting conclusions and differing interpretations, hindering scholarly consensus and impeding progress in understanding the Pentateuch's development.

Pentateuchal studies face challenges in historical contextualization due to gaps in understanding the socio-political landscape, cultural misinterpretation, and interpretative ambiguities. Inadequate historical context restricts a thorough understanding of the Pentateuch's original meaning and purpose, limiting its relevance to its original audience and obscuring its intended impact. As argued by John R. Bartlett (2006:574), archaeological limitations and debates on the text's historical accuracy also pose challenges in reconstructing the historical setting. A comprehensive historical context elucidates the Pentateuch's original meaning, facilitates its relevance to contemporary ethical, cultural, and social discourses, and serves as a foundation for a more nuanced interpretative framework. Addressing these gaps is crucial for advancing Pentateuchal studies, as it paves the way for a more comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of this foundational text within its original socio-political and cultural milieu.

The Pentateuch is a complex biblical text with numerous duplications, contradictions, and shifts in narrative style, leading to ongoing debates about its unity and coherence. Floss (2006:604) states that '[t]he critical study of the

Bible, led by Hebrew philology, noted duplications and contradictions in the Old Testament text, above all in that of the Pentateuch'. The text contains repetitions of similar stories or laws, contradictions, and narrative style shifts, such as historical accounts, legal codes, poetry, and genealogies. It also features distinct authorial voices, which can challenge maintaining narrative consistency. Interpretative dissonance arises from these issues, leading to divergent theories about the text's authorship, composition, and purpose. Debates on compilation and redactional processes also fuel these debates (Floss 2006:604). Recognizing the Pentateuch's complexity encourages critical engagement and a more nuanced interpretation. Navigating the complexities arising from duplications, contradictions, and shifts in narrative style is essential for a comprehensive understanding of this foundational biblical text.

The reception history and interpretive traditions surrounding the Pentateuch are crucial yet challenging aspects of Pentateuchal studies (Whitelam 2006:261). Despite their significance, comprehensive exploration remains limited, resulting in significant gaps in understanding. These gaps include historical context, transmission and use, interpretive diversity, and the impact on meaning. The Pentateuch has been subject to diverse interpretive traditions across religious and cultural contexts, making it difficult to understand the evolution of these traditions and their influence on interpretations. Fragmented studies and limited historical and interpretive records pose challenges in reconstructing the Pentateuch's reception history. An interdisciplinary approach involving collaboration among historians, theologians, religious scholars, and anthropologists is needed to address these gaps.

Contemporary Methodologies in Pentateuchal Studies

Several contemporary methods and approaches to Pentateuchal studies seek to shed light on its composition, organization, and interpretation; here is a brief survey of some. Some of these methods and approaches help to understand the historical and social background of the Pentateuch. These include looking at gender (Benjamin 2015), post-colonial perspectives (West and Dube 2000), digital technologies and technological advancements (Clivaz, Dilley, and Hamidovic 2017), interdisciplinary methods, and archaeology (Erisman 2014), making it possible to perform more thorough textual analyses. The

Pentateuch's persuasive strategies are examined using rhetorical analysis, which focuses on the intended effect on the audience. Intertextual studies investigate how the Pentateuch may have borrowed from or affected subsequent biblical literature by comparing it to other biblical and ancient Near Eastern works (Dozeman and Schmid 2011; Knoppers and Levinson 2007). The Pentateuch's repeating themes and narrative structures are discernible through structuralist and literary pattern analyses (Kawashima 2010:47-50). In reader-response criticism, the interpretation and application of the text in different situations are examined (Armstrong 1995). In order to uncover hidden voices and viewpoints, post-colonial (Boer 2013:193-220) and feminist (Brenner and Fontaine 2001) approaches to the Pentateuch analyse power relations, gender issues, and social challenges. All these help expose the richness and variety of viewpoints on these fundamental biblical texts, as well as contemporary methodologies in Pentateuchal studies, which improve understanding. Also, other research methods are used to study the Pentateuch, including textual analysis, literary analysis (Crawford 2022), sociolinguistics (Van Seters 1999), cognitive linguistics, and cognitive science, which study the cognitive processes in producing and understanding biblical texts. Reception history (Knoppers and Levinson 2007:18) investigates how various religious communities have altered, implemented, and interpreted the Pentateuch.

Socio-Cultural and Anthropological Approaches

Contemporary approaches to Pentateuchal studies have grown to include interdisciplinary methods, such as socio-cultural and anthropological viewpoints (Hess and Carroll 2012:87). These approaches seek to comprehend the Pentateuch as a religious and literary work that also serves as a window into the anthropological and socio-cultural conditions in which it was created. Placing the Pentateuch into its historical context entails looking at the ancient Near East's political, social, and economic circumstances at its composition (Hess and Carroll 2012:87).

The Pentateuch's social and cultural elements, such as familial systems, religious rites, and societal standards, are examined through socio-cultural study (Hess and Carroll 2012:87). When studying the Pentateuch, anthropological approaches utilize anthropological theories and concepts to examine identity, ethnicity, power dynamics, and ritual behaviour (Hess and

Carroll 2012:87). The interdisciplinary nature of these approaches benefits modern Pentateuchal studies by enabling researchers to develop a more thorough knowledge of the Pentateuch as a religious and cultural text influenced by its historical and social surroundings.

Theological and Hermeneutical Trends in Pentateuchal Studies

Theological ideas and interpretations abound in the Pentateuch. The creation and covenant, the promises made to the patriarchs, the exodus and freedom, the law and commandments, the covenant and obedience, holiness and ritual, the wilderness wanderings, and the renewal of the covenant are essential topics. Exodus centres on the Israelites' deliverance from Egyptian slavery, while Genesis begins with God's creation of the world and covenantal connection with humanity. A significant event is the giving of the Mosaic Law on Mount Sinai, and theological interpretations explore its moral and ethical import. There are reoccurring themes of covenant and obedience, with Leviticus emphasizing ritual purity, sacrifice, and holiness. The narrative of the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness in Numbers emphasizes divine guidance and tests of faith. The covenant is renewed in Deuteronomy, which also promotes keeping God's rules (Vanhoozer, Bartholomew, and Treier 2008).

There are also eschatological and messianic components, which allude to the anticipation of future events and the advent of a messiah and frequently study the layers of history and theology in the Pentateuch. There are other ways in which contemporary scholars read the Pentateuch, including but not limited to those discussed below.

Ethical and Moral Readings

Theological and hermeneutical trends in ethical and moral readings of Pentateuchal texts are crucial in contemporary scholarship and interpretation. Some of these approaches include contextualization, which emphasizes understanding Pentateuchal texts within their historical, cultural, and social contexts, acknowledging the specific circumstances that shape their teachings. Ethical universalism advocates for a universalist interpretation of ethical and moral principles, while relativism acknowledges the need to adapt ethical teachings to specific cultural contexts. Ethical progressivism suggests that

religious texts contain the seeds of ethical progress (Gentry 2016), suggesting interpreters should identify and emphasize religious teachings' more progressive and compassionate aspects.

Feminism and Gender Readings

One significant development in theological and hermeneutical trends in Pentateuchal studies is the incorporation of feminist and gender perspectives into the study of the Pentateuch. This shift has led to a deeper examination of how gender roles, power dynamics, and patriarchal ideologies are reflected in these foundational texts of the Hebrew Bible. Key trends include reevaluating patriarchal narratives, recovering marginalized female characters, examining gender ideologies, examining legal texts, and considering intersectionality.

Feminist scholars have critically examined patriarchal narratives, such as those of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the institution of polygamy and concubinage (Pilarski 2011). They have also sought to recover and amplify the voices and stories of female characters, such as Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel. Tikva Frymer-Kensky examined how the Pentateuch reflects and perpetuates particular gender ideologies and power structures, examining how these texts challenge and reinforce traditional gender roles (Pilarski 2011). Feminist and gender perspectives on the Pentateuch also consider the contemporary relevance of these ancient texts, exploring how insights gained from these studies can inform discussions about gender equality, social justice, and ethics today, which have introduced new hermeneutical methods to Pentateuchal studies.

Post-colonial and Liberationist Readings

Post-colonial and liberationist readings emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, focusing on the Bible's role in colonial history and in justifying colonial oppression. Post-colonial readings prioritize the voices of marginalized groups, explore resistance and adaptation, and deconstruct power structures within the text (Boer 2013). They have led to reevaluating the Bible's role in colonial history and to increased awareness of the need to read the text critically.

Liberationist readings, influenced by the mid-twentieth century theological and social justice movements, seek to find elements of liberation and social

justice within the Pentateuch and apply them to contemporary struggles for justice and equality (De La Torre 2013). They often focus on the Exodus narrative as a symbol of liberation from oppression, emphasizing the Pentateuch's teachings on justice, compassion, and caring for the vulnerable (De La Torre 2013). Liberationist readings encourage the ethical application of biblical principles to contemporary issues, inspiring activism and social change. Both post-colonial and liberationist readings of the Pentateuch represent attempts to engage with the text beyond traditional, historical-critical approaches, challenging readers to consider how the text can be a force for justice and liberation in a modern context.

Interfaith Dialogue Readings

Mary Callaway explores interfaith dialogue, focusing on the Pentateuch, examining perspectives from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions (2009:248-268). Understanding the Pentateuch has become essential for fostering meaningful conversations between religious traditions in a globalized world with increased interfaith dialogue. Pentateuch studies have evolved through various theological and hermeneutical trends, intersecting with the growing importance of interfaith dialogue. Scholars and religious leaders engage with the Pentateuch to build bridges between different faiths, promote tolerance, and deepen their understanding of its enduring significance.

Contemporary Debates on Pentateuchal Studies

The Pentateuch has been the subject of scholarly inquiry and debate for centuries. Contemporary debates include the Documentary Hypothesis, which suggests the Pentateuch is composed of multiple source documents (Nicholson 1998:3-4; Friedman 1987a), the debate over the date and authorship of the Pentateuch, the extent of editing and redaction, the literary structure, theological themes, the relationship between the Pentateuch and archaeological findings, the genre and purpose of the Pentateuch, its reception history, gender and ethics, and comparative studies. These have given birth to various theological interpretations of the Pentateuch that continue to surface, particularly concerning issues such as ethics, covenant theology, and the portrayal of God. Archaeological and historical evidence are also debated, as is the genre and intended audience of the Pentateuch. The field of Pentateuchal studies is dynamic, with new research and perspectives emerging from

scholars from diverse backgrounds and disciplines. Other significant areas of debate include but are not limited to those below.

The Debates of Historicity of the Pentateuch

The debate is between the traditional view, which sees the Pentateuch as historically accurate, and critical scholarship, which suggests it is a composite work with multiple authors and editors. The Documentary Hypothesis, proposed by scholars like Julius Wellhausen, suggests the Pentateuch is a compilation of several source documents, each with a distinct theological and historical perspective. Archaeological evidence has been used to support or challenge the historical claims of the Pentateuch (Schmidt 2007:23-25). Amihai Mazar (1992) has pointed to stories within the Pentateuch, such as references to camels in the patriarchal narratives before they were domesticated in the region. Some scholars argue that the Pentateuch should be read as theological literature primarily focusing on religious and moral teachings rather than a strictly historical account. Oral tradition and memory are sometimes emphasized in preserving accurate historical details over time, but critics question the reliability of oral transmission for extended periods. Alternative theories, such as the Supplementary Hypothesis (Bajić 2016:218) and the Fragmentary Hypothesis (Cassuto 2005), offer different explanations for the composition and editing of the Pentateuch. Theological implications of the debate over the historicity of the Pentateuch are significant, particularly for religious traditions that view these texts as divinely inspired and historically accurate.

Exodus and Conquest Narratives Debates

The historicity of the exodus and conquest narratives in the Pentateuch has been debated among scholars and theologians for centuries. Some proponents argue that the lack of concrete archaeological evidence does not necessarily discredit the historicity of these events.

Minimalists question the historical accuracy of the exodus and conquest narratives, pointing to the absence of direct archaeological evidence supporting the large-scale events described in the Bible (Schmidt 2007:23-25). These narratives might blend mythology, folklore, and historical elements. Maximalists argue that elements of the exodus and conquest narratives could have a historical basis, suggesting that the lack of direct evidence may be due

to methodological issues in archaeological research or that the events might not have left substantial archaeological traces (Thompson 2000). The argument between these two schools of thought continues despite the ample efforts of archaeological discoveries.

Patriarchal Narratives Debates

The historicity of the Pentateuch is a contentious issue. The patriarchal narratives, primarily found in Genesis, focus on the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (Hagedorn 2007:53-58). There are various perspectives on the historicity of these narratives. Based on faith and religious tradition, traditional belief sees the figures as literal history. Thomas L. Thompson (2016) argues that these stories are primarily legendary and were written later than the described events. Archaeological and historical research has provided some insights into the historicity of the Pentateuch, but definitive answers remain elusive. The historicity of the patriarchal narratives in the Pentateuch is a complex and debated issue influenced by religious beliefs and scholarly analysis that will continue for decades.

The Debates of Date and Composition of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch's historicity is contentious, with various theories and perspectives. The traditional view attributes the text's authorship to Moses, who wrote it during the thirteenth century BCE. The Documentary Hypothesis, developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, suggests the Pentateuch is a composite work of multiple source documents edited over centuries (Sweeney 2017). James Kugel (2007) suggests that additional layers of editing and redaction may have occurred. He suggests that the Pentateuch may contain a mix of historical events, traditions, and legends and should be approached cautiously. Continued debates like these do not suggest a near end to academic discourse. Notwithstanding, the Documentary Hypothesis and its variations have significantly influenced modern biblical scholarship.

Theology and History Debates

Theological perspectives view the Pentateuch as sacred scripture containing significant historical events for religious faith and practice (McDermott 2002). They believe it contains a divinely inspired account of the world's origins, the history of the Israelites, and the covenant between God and the people of Israel (Sweeney 2017). On the other hand, historical perspectives analyse the

Pentateuch as a historical document, using methods of historical criticism to examine its origins, sources, and authorship. It considers the Pentateuch a composite work, likely written and edited by multiple authors over centuries. Challenges and debates arise between theological and historical perspectives. Theological scholars often seek to harmonize the various elements of the Pentateuch and maintain its divine inspiration, while historical scholars may focus on discrepancies and contradictions within the text. Contemporary scholarship recognizes that theology and history can coexist in the study of the Pentateuch, aiming to approach the text with both theological and historical sensitivity.

Oral Debates in the Formation of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch has been a subject of scholarly debate for centuries, particularly regarding the role of orality in its formation. Orality refers to transmitting stories, traditions, and knowledge through spoken communication. Schniedewind (2004) affirms the transition from orality to literacy in ancient Israel and its impact on forming biblical texts, including the Pentateuch. Understanding the role of orality in forming the Pentateuch is crucial for assessing its historical accuracy. It played a significant role in ancient societies, especially before the widespread use of writing. Traditional scholarship often viewed the Pentateuch as authored by Moses, but contemporary scholarship emphasizes a more complex process of compilation and transmission (Baden 2020:1-14). One such scholar is Sailhamer (1995), whose work challenges traditional views of Mosaic authorship. Some scholars argue that oral traditions were passed down through generations before being written down, including stories of ancestral figures like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. One such example is Baker et al (2020), who represent a traditional perspective by defending the view that Moses was the sole author of the Pentateuch. They present arguments against the Documentary Hypothesis and support the idea of Mosaic authorship.

Postmodernism and Deconstruction

Postmodernism and deconstruction have significantly challenged traditional approaches to interpreting ancient texts, including religious ones like the Pentateuch. Postmodernism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes the fluidity of language and the multiple interpretations of texts. It promotes a relativistic view of truth, suggesting that there is no single objective truth but

rather a variety of perspectives and interpretations (Castelli et al 1995). Deconstruction, a literary theory, focuses on language's inherent ambiguity and instability, leading scholars to question the stability of the text's historical claims and explore alternative interpretations. Postmodern scholars have examined the composition and authorship of the Pentateuch, proposing that it may have been written and edited by multiple authors over time. This has led to questions about the historical reliability of the Pentateuch, as scholars now consider it a product of ancient cultural and religious traditions.

Emerging Paradigms in Pentateuchal Studies

Academic engagement and discussion in Pentateuchal studies continue to evolve as the years pass. Below are some of such emerging paradigms in the Pentateuchal studies.

Eco-Critical Approaches

Theodore Hiebert (1996:88-96; see also Santmire 2011) is one of the promoters of eco-critical approaches to Pentateuchal studies, new approaches in biblical scholarship that focus on the ecological dimensions of the Hebrew Bible. These approaches explore the theological foundations of the environment, ethical imperatives, theological anthropology, land theology, covenant and responsibility, and future directions in environmental crisis and climate change (Habel and Trudinger 2008). They often focus on Genesis' creation accounts, divine stewardship, and humanity's role in caring for the earth (Lawrie 2011). They challenge interpretations promoting unchecked natural resource exploitation and analyse the covenantal relationship between God and Israel (Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate 2010). Future directions in eco-critical Pentateuchal studies will involve addressing contemporary environmental crises and comparing the Pentateuch's teachings with other religious traditions.

Cognitive Science and the Pentateuch

One recent development is integrating cognitive science into the analysis and interpretation of Pentateuchal studies. This interdisciplinary approach offers insights into the cognitive processes involved in the Pentateuch's composition, transmission, and reception (Canale 2013). Cognitive science can shed light on the mental processes of the authors or communities behind the Pentateuch,

such as memory, attention, and cognitive biases. It can also help scholars explore oral tradition and memory, focusing on the role of mnemonic devices, repetition, and communal memory (Brettler, Enns, and Harrington 2012:210). Cognitive narratology can be employed to analyse the narrative structure of the Pentateuch, highlighting the psychological dimensions of storytelling (Barrett 2011). It can also provide tools for understanding the cultural and cognitive context in which the Pentateuch was produced, including the cognitive frameworks, beliefs, and worldviews that influenced the authors and original audiences. It can also help understand how later generations have received and interpreted the Pentateuch, providing insights into its enduring significance. Collaborations between biblical scholars, cognitive scientists, anthropologists, and psychologists are crucial for advancing this interdisciplinary approach.

Digital Humanities and Pentateuchal Research

Pentateuchal studies have seen significant advancements due to the integration of digital humanities approaches. Digital textual analysis tools enable scholars to identify patterns, linguistic features, and textual variations more precisely and efficiently. Digital databases of ancient manuscripts and textual variants have made it easier for researchers to compare different versions of the Pentateuch and analyse textual changes (Clark and Lindsey 2022). These digital textual analytical approaches include computational linguistics and natural language processing (NLP) techniques applied to Pentateuchal texts to analyse vocabulary usage, stylistic features, and authorship attribution. Geographic information systems (GIS) and digital mapping allow scholars to explore the geographical aspects of the Pentateuch. Social network analysis and graph theory study the relationships between characters and groups within the Pentateuch (Clark and Lindsey 2022:219). In studying sacred texts, there are ever more ethical concerns about data privacy, cultural sensitivity, and responsible technological usage. Future research will include machine learning and artificial intelligence with Pentateuchal study.

Multimodal and Multimedia Interpretations

Traditional approaches in Pentateuchal studies have primarily relied on linguistic and historical-critical methods. However, emerging paradigms and future directions in Pentateuchal studies have begun incorporating multimodal and multimedia interpretations, offering new perspectives and insights into

these ancient texts. Key aspects of this evolving field include visual analysis, material culture, spatial analysis, digital humanities, and interactive multimedia.

Visual analysis involves examining art, iconography, and ancient illustrations to understand the visual culture surrounding these texts (Sabharwal 2022). Material culture involves examining archaeological finds, artifacts, and inscriptions related to the Pentateuch. Spatial analysis uses GIS technology to map geographical locations and analyse their significance in the narrative. Digital humanities tools enable scholars to analyse large datasets, track linguistic patterns, and compare variations in ancient texts (Sabharwal 2022). Interactive multimedia platforms allow scholars to present research findings in engaging and accessible ways.

Interdisciplinary Collaborations and Global Perspectives

The study of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, has evolved significantly in recent years. Interdisciplinary approaches have enriched Pentateuchal studies, including collaboration with scholars of archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and comparative religion (Sabharwal 2022). Global perspectives have led to a more inclusive and comparative understanding of the Pentateuch, fostering new insights and interpretations.

Advances in manuscript research and textual studies have led to a better understanding of the transmission and textual history of the Pentateuch. Digital humanities tools are increasingly crucial in Pentateuchal studies, enabling data analysis, textual comparison, and visualization. Pentateuchal studies have evolved significantly, embracing interdisciplinary collaborations and global perspectives. These paradigms and future directions enrich one's understanding of the Pentateuch and its continued relevance in a diverse and interconnected world.

Prospects for Pentateuchal Studies

In light of all that, this survey has discussed Pentateuchal studies, which involve disciplines like biblical scholarship, theology, archaeology, linguistics, and literary analysis, and which has been influenced by source criticism, theological and religious perspectives, textual criticism, and interdisciplinary collaboration,

shedding light on shared cultural and literary themes, gender roles, social structures, and power dynamics in ancient Israel.

Prospects in this field will likely involve continued interdisciplinary research, technological advancements, and ongoing engagement with theological, interdisciplinary approaches, digital humanities, global perspectives, ethical considerations, and relevance to contemporary issues like social justice, ethics, and interfaith dialogue.

Therefore, the future of Pentateuchal studies will continue to be explored, but not without challenges, including the contentious questions on authorship and dating, historical accuracy, theological interpretations, and the complexity of texts. Despite these challenges, ongoing scholarship and interdisciplinary approaches offer promising prospects for the future of Pentateuchal studies. Since continuous moral and religious ethical questions exist, the Pentateuch is relevant to these conversations and debates, and its centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam fosters interfaith communication.

Conclusion

This survey on the contemporary trends and development of Pentateuchal studies has examined the emerging landscape of Pentateuchal studies, focusing on the methods, theories, and insights that have shaped the current understanding of the foundational text in the Hebrew Bible. It has examined various approaches, from source criticism to literary analysis, historical context, and intertextuality, to unravel the complexities of the Pentateuch with contemporary trends such as post-colonialism, feminist criticism, and ecological hermeneutics that have reshaped the discourse around the Pentateuch, contributing to understanding. It emphasized the importance of ongoing research and scholarship as discoveries and insights emerge, ensuring the continued relevance of Pentateuchal studies in the academic, religious, and cultural spheres. The goal is to provide a deeper understanding of the Pentateuch's significance and innovative approaches to engage with this ancient text in the modern world.

Integrating interdisciplinary perspectives in Pentateuchal studies, including feminist criticism, post-colonial readings, and ecological hermeneutics,

presents opportunities and challenges. Traditional methodologies often involve specific textual or historical aspects, making it difficult to maintain coherence in analysis. To overcome this, strategies include dialogue between scholars, blending diverse perspectives, identifying complementary aspects, and synthesizing insights. This approach enriches the understanding of the Pentateuch by offering multidimensional insights into gender dynamics, power structures, colonial influences, and ecological themes. A holistic interpretation transcends disciplinary boundaries and connects ancient texts with contemporary ethical, social, and environmental discourses. Understanding these dimensions within the Pentateuch contributes to its relevance in addressing modern societal concerns.

The Pentateuch is crucial in contemporary ethical, social, and cultural discourses. However, it faces challenges such as cultural and temporal divides, changing ethical frameworks, and balancing historical context. To overcome these, researchers must understand the text thoroughly, engage in ethical dialogue, and develop application frameworks. Balancing historical integrity is essential for preserving interpretation authenticity, avoiding misrepresentation, and reflecting human universals. Researchers can better understand the Pentateuch's relevance by ensuring interpretations remain faithful to the original historical context, avoiding misinterpretations, and identifying ethical principles that resonate with modern challenges. This requires a concerted effort within Pentateuchal scholarship, navigating methodological differences, interdisciplinary collaboration, and exploring the text's reception across diverse traditions. This will enrich interpretations, offer a more nuanced understanding, and facilitate its relevance in contemporary dialogues.

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