

Preface

The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah is written for use in topical undergraduate elective courses or seminary survey courses. The book is structured into four sections:

Part One: Introduction to the Pentateuch focuses on the literary structure of the Torah as a whole. The section introduces the names of the five books in the Hebrew Masoretic (MT) and Greek Septuagint (LXX) versions of the canon; it clarifies the plot, setting, and central characters in the overarching story of Genesis–Deuteronomy; and it examines the larger literary context of the Pentateuch in the Hebrew canon, exploring the relationship of Torah to the Prophetic Literature and to the Writings.

Part Two: Composition of the Pentateuch introduces the history of research on the formation of the Pentateuch in three chapters. Chapter 2 traces the changing views of the authorship of the Pentateuch—from the traditional Jewish and Christian understanding that Moses was the author to the identification of anonymous authors in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical criticism, culminating in the documentary hypothesis. Chapter 3 summarizes the impact of recovering oral stories and traditions behind the literature of the Pentateuch on the methodologies of form criticism and tradition history. Chapter 4 outlines the varied ways in which the authorship of the Pentateuch is described in the current practices of the documentary hypothesis and redaction criticism.

Part Three: Books of the Pentateuch provides an introduction to

each of the five books of the Pentateuch. The summary of each book includes three sections: (1) the outline and the central themes; (2) the literary design, including the examination of the plot, setting, and central characters of each book, as well as comparison to similar stories in ancient Near Eastern literature; and (3) composition.

Part Four: Reading the Pentateuch illustrates four different ways in which the readers bring meaning to the Torah. The four examples are limited, but they underscore the influence of readers in shaping the interpretation of Torah. Chapter 10 examines the transformation of the Pentateuchal literature into the Torah in post-exilic Judaism. Chapter 11 explores the ways in which the historical-critical study of the composition of the Pentateuch has also influenced the evaluation of the history of ancient Israel. Chapter 12 traces the changing theological interpretations of the Pentateuch in Christian and Jewish traditions from early Protestantism to the present time. Chapter 13 broadens in scope to explore selective themes in the reception history of the Pentateuch, including its influence in the American experience of colonization and the reaction of women to its patriarchal bias in their struggle to achieve equal opportunity in civil and religious law.

The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah may be used as either an introductory or an intermediate level textbook. As an introductory textbook, the instructor may wish to concentrate on **Part One: Introduction to the Pentateuch** and on **Part Three: Books of the Pentateuch**. These sections focus directly on the text of the Pentateuch, providing basic information on the plot, setting, and characters of the Pentateuch as a whole and on each individual book. **Part Two: Composition of the Pentateuch** introduces more complex historical-critical ways of reading the Pentateuchal literature, which is tied to the section entitled “Composition,” in the interpretation of each book. In an introductory level course on the Pentateuch, the research on composition may be used as supplemental material on selective books or passages. **Part Four: Reading the Pentateuch** includes self-standing chapters, from which the instructor may select topics of interest to the students. A more advanced intermediate level course

may simply follow the structure of the textbook to explore the present state of research on the Pentateuch.

The field of Pentateuch studies is developing so rapidly that it is difficult to keep up with the changing landscape. I would certainly not have been able to write this volume without the many new insights into the Pentateuch from my colleagues, shared freely at seminars and symposia. I have sought to bring as many voices into the conversation as possible, but I am well aware that this book could be expanded in so many directions with additional readings that deserve a hearing. This textbook originated from my teaching the Pentateuch at United Theological Seminary over the past two decades. I would like to thank my students for their interest in studying the Pentateuch and for the many insights they have brought to the classroom, without which this book would also not have been written. I would like to thank, in particular, Walter Brueggemann and Benjamin Sommer for reading Chapter 12: Pentateuch and Theology; Konrad Schmid for reading a portion of Chapter 4; my teaching assistant Chad Clark for his excellent editing of the manuscript; and the editors at Fortress Press for steering the project through to publication, including Neil Elliot, acquiring editor for biblical studies; Scott Tunseth for guiding the book through the editing process, and Alicia Ehlers for managing the project to its completion.