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Chapter 2

The Five Books of Moses

NAMES

Pentateuch is not a biblical name. It is derived from the Greek and means simply "five books." It has been applied for a long time to the first five books of the Bible. The Jews themselves referred to these books as the Torah, that is, the Law. Either of these titles can be used to designate the five books written by Moses.

The Bible refers to the Pentateuch by a variety of terms. Some of these are: the law of Moses; the book of the law; the law of God; the law of Moses, the man of God. These terms are composed of various combinations of four words — law, book, Moses, and God. These words express well the major points to remember about the Pentateuch. "Law" expresses the legal character of the Pentateuch, which contains many of God's laws to men. "Book" shows that the Pentateuch is intended to be permanent. "Moses" identifies the human author of the books, and "God" points to the divine author, by whose inspiration Moses wrote. If we keep these terms in mind, we will always have a proper approach to our study of the Pentateuch.

PURPOSE

In the Pentateuch God gives us a picture of the earliest historical development of the theocracy. The five books, taken together, enable us to understand how God laid the foundations of His kingdom. Everything in the Pentateuch is designed to accomplish this end. The Pentateuch is not simply history. It does not attempt to present or explain everything which happened. There are places where it passes over large periods of time in silence. For example, the four hundred and thirty years in Egypt are scarcely mentioned. The thirty-eight years of wilderness wandering are summarized briefly. These omissions are explained by the fact that during these periods nothing happened which advanced the development of God's kingdom. Moses wrote with a purpose in mind — to trace the beginnings of the Kingdom of God. Therefore he chose his material carefully, so that this story would stand out clearly, and not be lost amidst the clutter of unnecessary information.

AUTHOR

What the Bible Says

For centuries Christians and Jews have agreed unanimously that Moses was the human author of these books. This belief has a solid

basis in the testimony of God's Word. There is not a part of the Bible that questions the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. On the contrary, every part of the Bible affirms that Moses wrote these books. The Pentateuch contains at least six places where Moses is said to write certain events or revelations from God (Ex. 17:14; 24:4-8; 34:27; Num. 33:1, 2; Deut. 31:9, 22). One of them, Deuteronomy 31:9, is especially significant. It tells that Moses not only wrote the law of God, but delivered it to the Levites for safekeeping. The rest of the Old Testament also assumes that the Pentateuch is the work of Moses. Already in Joshua we have a reference to "the book of the law of Moses" (Josh. 8:31). From the time of Joshua to the time of Ezra, the repeated, unanimous testimony of the Old Testament presents Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. In the New Testament Christ names Moses as the author of certain statements which are found only in the Pentateuch (Matt. 19:8; Mark 10:5). And He speaks of the "law of Moses" (Luke 24:44). In fact, throughout the Bible, every reference to the law means the Pentateuch, and wherever the author of the Pentateuch is named, it is Moses. This does not mean that Moses wrote every word of the Pentateuch. For instance, Deuteronomy 34 deals with his death and the mourning that followed it. This was surely added by another inspired writer. But, in the main, the Pentateuch comes from God through Moses.

What Men Say

With such a weight of evidence in favor of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, one would expect to find unanimous agreement on this matter. But as a matter of fact, such agreement is sadly lacking. There are many men who deny that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. And these are men who are scholars, and who have applied their scholarship to the study of the Bible. Why do they deny what the Bible so clearly teaches? First of all, they do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God. While some may state this more openly than others, basically it is true of all the Higher Critics, as they are called. They think that the Old Testament must be studied as a piece of human literature. They do not hesitate to declare that it can be, and is wrong at many places. They are sure that it is wrong when it presents Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. They believe that it was written much later, and that the author used Moses' name to gain recognition for his work.

You see, by taking this view the Critics can explain away some features about the Pentateuch which they do not like. For instance, the Pentateuch contains some prophecies which were fulfilled. These the Higher Critics explain by claiming that the book was written after the fulfillment, and the prophecy was included in the book to impress the

readers. In a similar manner, the miracles of the Pentateuch are explained as mere legends of an early age, which did not actually happen. You may wonder why these men work so hard to explain away these things. The answer is really quite simple. If these men admit that Moses wrote these books, if these prophecies are real prophecies and these miracles are true miracles, then the God presented in the Pentateuch must also be real. If He is real, they should love Him and obey Him. But they do not do so, and they do not want to do so. This makes them sinners. But they do not want to admit that they are sinners before God. They do not want to face the demands of a sovereign God. So they simply deny that the Pentateuch presents an accurate picture of God. And to deny the God of the Pentateuch, they must deny that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.

The Problem of the Critics

If Moses did not write the Pentateuch, who did? And when? These are fair questions to put to the Higher Critics. And if we did so, each one would give a different answer. And each one would be sure that the others were wrong and that he was right. They can only agree on one point — that Moses did not write the Pentateuch. They cannot agree at all about how it did come into existence. This disagreement is an indication that they do not speak the truth.

We cannot afford to ignore such men as we study the Old Testament. We must never forget that they exist, for some day we may meet them. Many people teach the views of higher criticism as the truth. We must know about this false position. But we must always remember that these men speak as they do because they deny that the Bible is God's Word. They do not have the light of the Holy Spirit. And we do not want to be led by those who themselves walk in darkness.

EXERCISES

Factual questions

1. What does Pentateuch mean? Torah? To what books do they refer?
2. What words does the Bible use to describe the Pentateuch? What does each word emphasize?
3. What is the main story of the Pentateuch?
4. Who is the human author of the Pentateuch? What biblical proof can be found for this?
5. Why do men deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch?
6. On what important question do Higher Critics differ?

Thought question

1. What do the Higher Critics lack that is necessary for understanding the Bible?