

## Gleanings from the John H. Sailhamer Papers at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

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*The personal papers of Dr. John H. Sailhamer are housed in the archives at the Library at Southeastern Seminary and are available for study and research. This voluminous collection is comprised of over 2,200 items that span his 36-year teaching career (1974–2010). Particularly valuable are his class notes and unpublished drafts. Viewed against the backdrop of his published work, these materials provide additional insight into Sailhamer's thought and scholarship because they sometimes deal with topics that were not treated (or treated in as much detail) in his published work. They also show the development of his thought on some issues. Further research would undoubtedly reveal even more about the ideas of this eminent evangelical OT scholar.*

*Key Words: development of thought, gleanings, John Sailhamer, research, Southeastern Seminary, unpublished papers*

### Introduction

The purpose of this essay is fourfold: (1) to raise awareness of the John H. Sailhamer papers and their value for research purposes, (2) to provide a brief orientation to these papers as an aid to their use, (3) to share gleanings from my research in these materials, and (4) to suggest areas of further research.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Tracy McKenzie, Seth Postell, and Chris Chen for providing feedback on earlier versions of this article. The writing of this article would not have been possible without the support of Union University (for granting sabbatical leave for fall semester 2017), Southeastern Seminary (for accepting me as a Visiting Scholar for part of that time), and Patty Sailhamer (for providing invaluable input, giving her husband's personal library to Southeastern, and giving me access to additional files at their home in Fullerton, CA). Ray Lubeck and Chris Chen also graciously shared their own copies of Sailhamer-related notes with me.

### The John H. Sailhamer Papers and Their Value

Dr. John H. Sailhamer (1946–2017) was a leading evangelical Old Testament and Hebrew scholar who taught at Southeastern from 1999–2006. It was his second-to-last institution during his illustrious 36-year career. His passing on January 9, 2017 brought about a renewed reflection on his life and scholarship. In a written statement read at his memorial service, Walter Kaiser remarked, “John Sailhamer was always one of my closest friends and a real source of theological stimulation.”<sup>2</sup> This service also included written statements by Chuck Swindoll, Wayne Grudem, and John Piper, who called Sailhamer's life “a great life” and credited him with assisting him in sermon preparation, encouraging him during the Open Theism controversy, and supporting his “wild idea” to start a seminary.<sup>3</sup> In a video recording that was part of a separate remembrance service at Sailhamer's last institution, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (now Gateway Seminary), four-time colleague David Howard, Jr. called him “a great influence on me” and “one of the brightest people I've ever met.”<sup>4</sup> Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Seminary, called him “the quintessential Christian scholar” whose classroom teaching was “truly legendary.”<sup>5</sup>

Sailhamer's impact on Southeastern Seminary continues to this day through his colleagues and former students who are now faculty or staff there. This impact also includes his personal library, which was generously donated to the seminary library by his wife Patty. Whereas his books are kept in the Sailhamer Room, his personal papers are kept in the archives, where they are available for research purposes. The content includes class notes, unpublished drafts, journal articles, correspondence, and even a few fascinating artifacts. They amount to 15 record cartons (1 cubic foot each) and contain over 2,200 items.

These papers provide a unique view into Sailhamer's life and scholarship. Although his scholarship should be understood first and foremost through his publications and classroom teaching, his papers sometimes

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<sup>2</sup> This statement was printed and displayed at the service. Photo in author's possession.

<sup>3</sup> These statements were also printed and displayed at the service. Photos in author's possession.

<sup>4</sup> <https://vimeo.com/201295458/3be7538ad3> (accessed 9/21/17). See the 1:23 mark.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.sebts.edu/news-and-events/headlines/2017/01/SP16\\_Sailhamer.aspx](https://www.sebts.edu/news-and-events/headlines/2017/01/SP16_Sailhamer.aspx) (accessed 9/21/17).

provide a fascinating additional perspective. Sailhamer was known for revising his material for a long time (sometimes for years) before publishing it. His papers, for example, contain drafts of *Genesis Unbound*,<sup>6</sup> which were likely worked and re-worked. Furthermore, Sailhamer's knowledge, which obviously included his published material, far exceeded it. Nowhere is this more evident than in the various sets of class notes that he used for teaching and sometimes distributed to his students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School,<sup>7</sup> Western Seminary, Southeastern, and Golden Gate. From the time he started teaching while a Ph.D. student at UCLA in the mid-1970s, his class notes were composed in complete sentences and organized according to a clear outline. As a result, the ideas expressed in such notes, which he continued to compose throughout his entire career, are comprehensible to researchers. His thoroughness and clarity are posterity's gain. Often themselves reflecting re-working and updated versions, his class notes were used for courses such as Hebrew Syntax, Habakkuk, the Psalms, Hermeneutics, Isaiah, and other subjects that were never given the full-length treatment in his publications that they received in a classroom setting. Much of the material from his notes, especially on the Pentateuch and Old Testament theology (with a healthy dose of hermeneutics folded in), eventually did, of course, find extended published expression. On the other hand, it is also true that much of his material did not.

Even though the latter material should be assumed to be unfinished and interpreted in the context of his published work, it is these class notes along with his other unpublished drafts that are the most valuable for biblical studies as a record of Sailhamer's views on certain matters. Moreover, because of the different versions of these notes and the ability to date some of them (see "Orientation" below), they also at times suggest the development of his thought on particular issues (see "Gleanings" below), especially during the period before his first well-known work was published in 1992, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (his commentary on Chronicles was published in 1983 and a few articles were also published during this period). Sometimes specific influences on his thought can likewise be detected through his citation of secondary literature in these notes or suggested through the mere presence of a journal article that he kept together with a particular set of class notes.

<sup>6</sup> Box 4, Folder 19 and Box 13, Folders 4–5, 11, John H. Sailhamer papers, Archives and Special Collections, Library at Southeastern, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC. All citations of box and folder in this article are with respect to these papers.

<sup>7</sup> Based on the experiences of two of his former students at Trinity, Joe Wong and Ray Lubeck.

### A Brief Orientation to the John H. Sailhamer Papers

As mentioned above, the John H. Sailhamer papers are voluminous, amounting to over 2,200 items and comprising thousands upon thousands of pages. With so much material, it may be helpful to provide a brief orientation to those who might want to use them for their own study, teaching, and/or research. The starting point is the helpful online "Finding Aid" created by the archives staff at Southeastern Seminary.<sup>8</sup> This searchable spreadsheet lists every item by box number and folder number, along with its date (if known), type (e.g., class notes, manuscript, etc.), and title/subject. The items listed vary in length, some being just a single page, others a thick stack of class notes or book manuscript, and many in between. The majority of the most valuable material for researchers is contained in Boxes 1–4 and 12–14. The other boxes contain mainly unannotated secondary literature (Boxes 5–11), although they do contain some annotated secondary literature (e.g., Box 7, Folders, 1–4, 36–37; Box 9, Folders 3, 7, 12, 16; Box 11, Folders 1, 2, and 5) and some of Sailhamer's own notes (e.g., Box 7, Folder 18; Box 8, Folder 27; Box 11, Folder 5).

Although most of Sailhamer's papers are undated, the physical appearance of the particular paper used for various notes gives a general indication of its age.<sup>9</sup> The naked eye can easily tell that some paper is newer, and some is quite old. Furthermore, Sailhamer often used certain types of scratch paper that his family has identified as belonging to certain periods of his life. For example, the "banana paper" and "California Car[t]age Co." paper, whose physical appearance already appears to be older, has been linked to the period of his pre-dissertation doctoral studies at UCLA (1974–1978) prior to taking a full-time teaching position at Bethel College in Minnesota. Being from the pre-personal computer age, the blank side of this kind of paper was often used for handwritten class notes. Another type of scratch paper that Sailhamer often used was Bethel Theological Seminary letterhead, which always for some reason bore the name "Robert A. Guelich," a former professor of New Testament Language and Literature who later taught at Fuller Seminary and died in 1991.<sup>10</sup> The blank

<sup>8</sup> <http://library.sebts.edu/archives/sailhamer> (accessed 12/15/17). I would like to thank Steve Jones, archivist at Southeastern, for his support of this project, including giving input on this section of the article and facilitating the reproduction of selected materials for my research.

<sup>9</sup> These visual cues are currently being used by archives staff at Southeastern to add approximate dates to undated materials as they update the finding aid and prepare portions of the collection for digitization.

<sup>10</sup> [http://articles.latimes.com/1991-07-13/news/mn-1669\\_1\\_professor-at](http://articles.latimes.com/1991-07-13/news/mn-1669_1_professor-at)

side of this type of scratch paper was used for handwritten notes (e.g., Box 1, Folder 24; Box 13, Folder 16) or typewritten notes (e.g., Box 3, Folder 8). In some cases, in addition to suggesting an approximate date for the original production of certain class notes, it should be observed that sometimes class notes handwritten on these identifiable types of scratch paper were apparently re-used in courses taught during a later period of his career.<sup>11</sup>

Incidentally, Sailhamer's production of his class notes (and in some cases, books) in this way from earlier "source" material generally parallels his view of the "composition" of biblical books and of the Tanak.<sup>12</sup> Two more suggestive parallels between Sailhamer's scholarly practice and his views on Scripture are: (1) his belief in "punctuated equilibrium" related to the formation of the Tanak<sup>13</sup> and possible "punctuated equilibrium" in his own thinking, especially as it relates to creative breakthroughs, and (2) his belief that the Masoretic text has "postbiblical layers"<sup>14</sup> and his own heavily annotated Hebrew Bible (these annotations being another "post-biblical layer" in themselves) that he used throughout his career.<sup>15</sup>

The development of printing technology is also reflected in the various types of printer paper used for printed class notes. Older style ("continuous feed") printer paper is serially attached on its short (horizontal) edges, and its long (vertical) edges have detachable paper strips with holes used to guide the paper through the printer. After a document is printed, these strips are manually removed and each sheet of paper manually detached from the sheets of paper preceding and following. The detachment along

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fuller-seminary (accessed 9/22/17).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Box 14, Folder 10 includes two sheets of "Bethel paper" in notes for a course taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Box 14, Folder 16 includes handwritten notes on "banana paper" in notes for a course taught at Philadelphia College of the Bible in 1995.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 22–23, 28, 54–56. This parallel has also been pointed out by James M. Hamilton, "John Sailhamer's *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*: A Review Essay," *SBJT* 14.2 (2010): 64, "Sailhamer's emphasis on compositional strategy and his focus on intertextuality actually prompted me to wonder whether he was imitating the Bible itself in the composition of his own book."

<sup>13</sup> See handwritten outline and diagram in Box 13, Folder 41 (left hand margin); handwritten illustration of "New Testament Background" in Box 14, Folder 46; "Biblical Theology and Composition of the Hebrew Bible," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 30–31.

<sup>14</sup> Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 217.

<sup>15</sup> This Bible remains at the Sailhamer's home in Fullerton, CA.

all four edges of this older printer paper is observable to the naked eye in some of Sailhamer's notes. There even appears to be at least two subtypes of this general kind of older printer paper, judging from the different appearances of the edges and the different kind of printing on the paper (see Box 1, Folder 21; Box 2, Folders 2–4, 6, 9). The older and lower print quality of the two appears to be the product of a dot matrix printer. Although "continuous feed" printer paper is still in use today, it has long since become uncommon in homes and offices. This allows for an approximate dating of the original printing of these kinds of materials in Sailhamer's papers. They are frequently found during his Trinity Evangelical Divinity School era (1983–1994). Relatedly, there is also the rare appearance of yellow scratch paper indicated as being from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (e.g., Box 1, Folder 27). What we consider today to be modern printer paper and modern print (laser) quality is typical for class notes sometimes distributed for courses at Western, Southeastern, and Golden Gate. While the irony of attempting to date Sailhamer's papers is not lost on us (he recognized the inherent difficulty of dating some of the material in the Bible and sometimes hesitated to affix a precise date to them), the approximate dating of some of Sailhamer's undated papers remains possible and helpful for research purposes.

Relatedly, it would be helpful for the researcher to know the general timeline of Sailhamer's teaching career. It began on a part-time basis while he was in Southern California during the pre-dissertation phase of his Ph.D. studies at UCLA (1974–1978). He then took a full-time teaching post at Bethel College and then Bethel Seminary (1978–1983). His longest teaching position was at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1983–1994). From 1994–1999, Sailhamer commuted to teach for one year at Philadelphia College of the Bible (1994–1995) and then lived in Minnesota four years (1995–1999). During the latter period, he was a scholar-in-residence at Northwestern College in St. Paul, MN (1995–1998) and traveled at various times to teach at Western Seminary (which continued on a visiting basis even during his years at Southeastern and Golden Gate). His last two full-time teaching positions were at Southeastern (1999–2006) and Golden Gate (2007–2010).<sup>16</sup> His retirement period (2010–2017), induced by challenges to his health, coincided with the end of his scholarly endeavors.

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<sup>16</sup> For a longer biographical essay by his wife Patty, see "Biography of John H. Sailhamer," in *Text and Canon: Essays in Honor of John H. Sailhamer*, eds. Robert L. Cole and Paul J. Kissling (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), xi–xvi.

### Gleanings from the John H. Sailhamer Papers

In the process of going through a large portion of the most valuable boxes for researchers (Boxes 1–4 and 12–14), I discovered several fascinating things in the John H. Sailhamer papers. One, though comprising only a small percentage of these papers, is scholarly correspondence and/or files that concern or were produced by especially valued colleagues. For example, Walter Kaiser, who was Sailhamer’s dean at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, wrote a memo concerning a tentative reading list for Ph.D. candidates in Old Testament, which is found in Box 14, Folder 40. In one unpublished manuscript, Sailhamer asks, “Is Walt Kaiser an Evangelical Freier?” though he does not explore the question further (Box 13, Folder 14). In another, Sailhamer provides a nine-page biography of Kaiser (Box 14, Folder 29), an earlier version of the one published in *Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*.<sup>17</sup> These elements confirm and illustrate Kaiser’s comments on their close friendship cited above. Likewise, Bruce Waltke, whom Sailhamer calls “my friend and mentor” on the dedication page of his *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, is similarly represented.<sup>18</sup> In an envelope postmarked September 21, 2007, when Sailhamer was at Golden Gate, Waltke, then at Regent College in Vancouver, had evidently sent a dissertation on Exodus 1–24 to Sailhamer’s attention (Box 14, Folder 33). About twenty months prior (January 24, 2006), a portion of Waltke’s manuscript from his magnum opus, *An Old Testament Theology*,<sup>19</sup> had been sent to Sailhamer from Zondervan for his endorsement (Box 2, Folder 14). Sailhamer had been a student of Waltke’s at Dallas Theological Seminary and even kept class notes that he had handwritten in 1971 on binder paper while a student in Waltke’s Old Testament Introduction class (Box 13, Folder 57). Sailhamer also adapted some of Waltke’s material when he started teaching Hebrew (Box 1, Folder 16). Sailhamer would contribute articles to

<sup>17</sup> Sailhamer, “Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.,” in *Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*, ed. Walter Elwell and J. D. Weaver (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 376–87. The article begins on p. 375 with an introductory section on Kaiser’s “Life and Times” that is not included in the version in Box 14, Folder 29. The published version also shows evidence of additional editing.

<sup>18</sup> See the preface to *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 5–6, which specifically highlights Waltke and Kaiser. Of Waltke, he said, “To have studied with this scholar is a rare privilege.” Of Kaiser, he said, “Both in his writings and in personal conversation, Dr. Kaiser has taught me much about the theology of the OT.”

<sup>19</sup> Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

*Festschriften* for both Waltke and Kaiser.<sup>20</sup> He also contributed to one for Gleason Archer.<sup>21</sup>

Besides those that concern Kaiser and Waltke, Sailhamer’s papers also contain several articles and sermon manuscripts by John Piper (see especially Box 5, Folder 3–6; also Box 11, Folder 31; Box 13, Folder 46), four articles and a presentation outline by Wayne Grudem (Box 12, Folder 3; Box 14, Folder 17), and what appear to be three transcripts of sermons by John MacArthur, Jr. (Box 14, Folder 30).<sup>22</sup> Sailhamer’s papers do not contain multiple works from many evangelical contemporaries, so his filing away of these works is suggestive of his respect for these colleagues. His collegiality is also evident through correspondence concerning a dinner and discussion that was hosted in his home during his time at Trinity for Chicago-area Old Testament scholars on January 22, 1990 (Box 13, Folder 38). Attendees included Kaiser, Archer, Terence Fretheim, Jack Lundbom, Edward “Ted” Campbell (McCormick Seminary), Eugene Roop (Bethany Seminary), Wesley Fuerst (Lutheran School of Theology), and Leslie Hoppe (Catholic Theological Union). Ralph Klein was invited but wrote a letter explaining why he could not attend.

Sailhamer’s papers also reveal influences on his thought. In conjunction with his collection of books, the secondary literature that he kept on file, which make up most of Boxes 5–11, were probably pieces that he felt

<sup>20</sup> See “A Wisdom Composition of the Pentateuch?,” in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke*, ed. J. I. Packer and Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 15–35; “Preaching from the Prophets,” in *Preaching the Old Testament*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 115–36. Sailhamer kept copies of both articles in his own files as well (see Box 2, Folder 11, 31; Box 4, Folder 8).

<sup>21</sup> See “Exegesis of the Old Testament as a Text,” in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, ed. Walter Kaiser and Ronald Youngblood (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 279–96. Copies of this essay are also found in Box 2, Folder 11; Box 3, Folders 1, 11.

<sup>22</sup> The one entitled, “Preaching the Word in and out of Season” almost exactly matches the sermon transcript of “Preaching the Word in and [sic] Out-of-Season Culture” posted here: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-226/preaching-the-word-in-and-outofseason-culture> (accessed 12/18/17). Likewise, “Insight into a Pastor’s Heart—Part 1” almost exactly matches the sermon transcript posted here: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/GTY71/insight-into-a-pastors-heart-part-1> (accessed 12/18/17). Similarly, “Insight into a Pastor’s Heart—Part 2” almost exactly matches the sermon transcript posted here: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/GTY72/insight-into-a-pastors-heart-part-2> (accessed 12/18/17). During his UCLA days, Sailhamer taught for John MacArthur’s LOGOS Bible Study Center at Grace Community Church.

were worth keeping and having readily accessible. Occasionally, an article has been instead placed together with class notes, which suggests its special importance for that subject. One example of this is F. F. Bruce's article, "The Earliest Interpretation of the Old Testament,"<sup>23</sup> which is found in Box 2, Folder 1 in a section of Sailhamer's papers that focuses on biblical interpretation. Bruce's interest is in "that [interpretation] which is found within the Hebrew Scriptures themselves,"<sup>24</sup> including "the reinterpretation of earlier prophecy by later prophets."<sup>25</sup> The first example Bruce considers is Gog, concerning whom Ezek 38:17 "plainly announced that Gog's invasion of the Holy Land has been foretold by earlier prophets, although not under the same name."<sup>26</sup> In Sailhamer's published work, he agrees with Bruce's main observation about Ezek 38:17 while differing with his qualification, "although not under the same name." Sailhamer finds Gog by name in Num 24:7 LXX and other ancient versions.<sup>27</sup> Bruce thinks that Gog has been "introduced . . . in spite of his absence from the Hebrew text."<sup>28</sup> The "eschatological interpretation" that Bruce thinks is not original and has been "placed upon the words" in the LXX<sup>29</sup> Sailhamer instead sees as fitting the literary context.<sup>30</sup> In Dan 11, Bruce also notes the connection between Gog and the "king of the north" who is suddenly destroyed in the land of Israel (vv. 40–45) and the interpretation of the "ships from Kittim" in Num 24:23 with reference to Roman ships in Dan 11:30.<sup>31</sup> Sailhamer also discusses Num 24:23–24 in relation to Dan 11:30.<sup>32</sup> Although Sailhamer did not cite Bruce's article, perhaps because his own position was sufficiently distinct, the preceding considerations suggest that this article played a role in the development

<sup>23</sup> F. F. Bruce, "The Earliest Interpretation of the Old Testament," in *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 37–52.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* Bruce cites Isaiah's prophecies concerning the Assyrians (Isa 10:32; 31:8; 37:29) and Jer 4:6–29, which may concern the Scythians, who "come from the same general area as Gog and his allies."

<sup>27</sup> Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 244–45.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce, "The Earliest Old Testament Interpretation," 40.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 409, "this last oracle of Balaam [Num 24:23–24] appears to place the scope of his oracles too far in the future to be a reference to the reign of David." Also see *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 245.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce, "The Earliest Old Testament Interpretation," 42.

<sup>32</sup> Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 409; *idem*, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 49, 201, 222.

of Sailhamer's thinking and work. Daniel 11 and Ezek 38 are especially highlighted in his 2000 article for the *Bulletin for Biblical Research*,<sup>33</sup> and his attention to Num 24 goes as far back as his days as a Ph.D. student at UCLA.<sup>34</sup>

Another example is Sailhamer's citation of "Greenberg" (no work cited) regarding the interpretation of the divine name in Exod 3:14 as meaning, "I am who is (with you)," in his handwritten class notes (Box 13, Folder 53). This interpretation is similarly found in *The Pentateuch as Narrative*,

The Lord's reply, "I am who I am," may be paraphrased as, "It is I who am with you." . . . the name of God, "Yahweh," is meant to convey the sense of "he who is present" or "he who has promised to be present with his people." In giving his name to Moses, then, God not only promised to be present with him and his people but also recalled the promise itself: "he who is with us."<sup>35</sup>

Though Sailhamer cites Cassuto instead, Moshe Greenberg's *Understanding Exodus* may also have been a source for Sailhamer's view on the divine name. Greenberg comments, "Perhaps the simplest way to take it is as expressing the essence of the phrase 'ehye 'immak (verse 12): "[My name is] 'ehye (for the ellipsis cf. Gen. 23:28b), for/in that I will be/am (present). . . . The significance of the name is, accordingly, 'the present one, he who is there."<sup>36</sup>

One of the most interesting things that can be gleaned from the John H. Sailhamer papers is evidence of the development of his thought. The observations I make in the following are only a sampling of what his papers could reveal about this broad topic (see "Areas for Further Research"

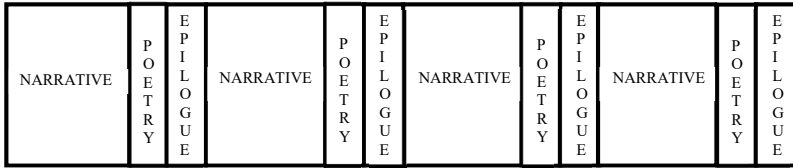
<sup>33</sup> Sailhamer, "Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon," *BBR* 10 (2000): 91.

<sup>34</sup> Secondary literature on Num 24 is found grouped with notes from his days as a Ph.D. student at UCLA. This material is currently on file at Sailhamer's home in Fullerton, CA and includes commentary by H. Holzinger, *Numeri* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1903); Julius Wellhausen, *Die Komposition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, 4th ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963); Dillman on Num 24:7–19, source unspecified (perhaps *Die Bücher Numeri, Deuteronomium und Josue* [Leipzig: Hirzel, 1886], in the series, *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament*). Sailhamer's notecard box that he used to file notes for his dissertation on the translation of verbs in Ps 3–41 LXX also has sections for Num 23–24 and other major poems in the OT, including Gen 49, Deut 32–33, Judg 5, and 1 Sam 2:1–10.

<sup>35</sup> Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 246.

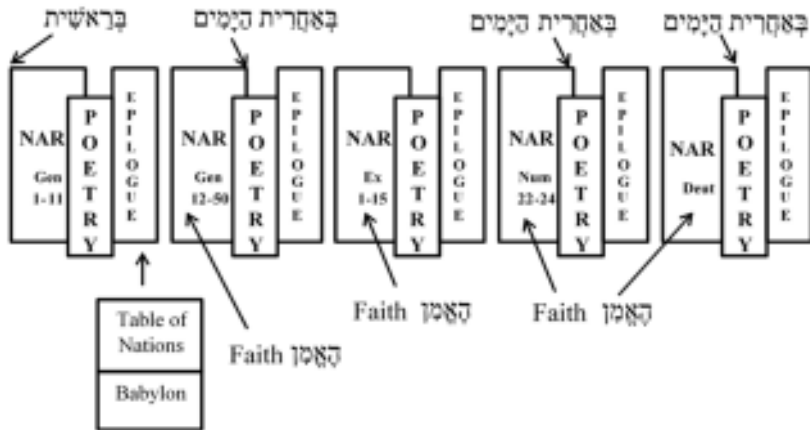
<sup>36</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, The Heritage of Biblical Israel (New York: Behrman House, 1969), 81–82.

below). I limit myself to several examples that can be dealt with relatively briefly. Particularly notable are Sailhamer's earlier, unpublished proposals for the structure of the Pentateuch. One of the hallmarks of his published work on the Pentateuch is an argument for its overall structure as a sequence of narrative, poetry, and epilogue that repeats four times.<sup>37</sup>



The first narrative-poetry-epilogue sequence corresponds to Gen 1–50, the second to Exod 1:1–15:21, the third to Exod 15:22–Num 24:25, and the fourth to Num 25–Deut 34. With the exception of the second section of poetry (Exod 15:1–18), he argues that the other three poetic sections (Gen 49; Num 23–24; Deut 32–33) contain Messianic prophecy in connection with the phrase “in the last days” (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 31:29). This a key piece of his argument that the message of the Pentateuch centers on the Messiah.

However, in Box 13, Folder 3, there is a diagram he produced that describes the Pentateuch in terms of *five* repetitions of the narrative-poetry-epilogue sequence.

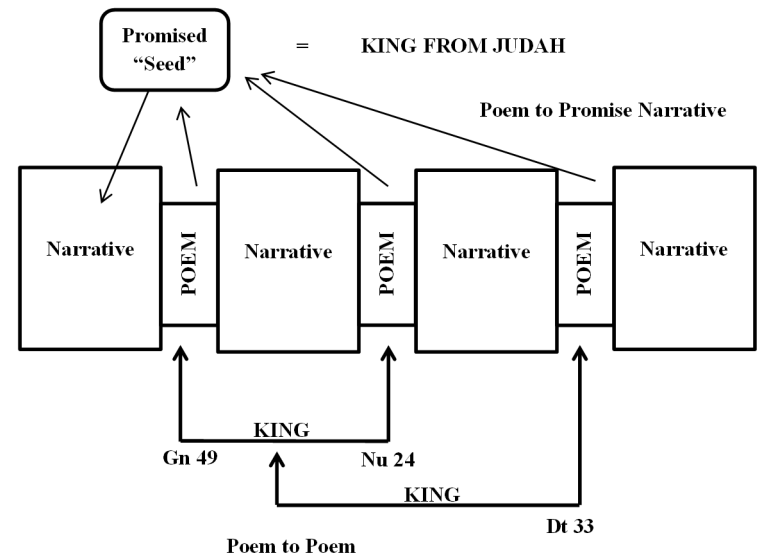


<sup>37</sup> *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 35–37; *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 210–12; *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 36. The diagram below is not found in these works. I produced it to reflect his published work and as a point of comparison to the two other diagrams below.

What was the first sequence in his published work (Gen 1–50) used to be broken into two (Gen 1–11, Gen 12–50).<sup>38</sup>

Though perhaps not intended to give as much detail as some of his other diagrams of the structure of the Pentateuch, a different diagram in Box 14, Folder 6 illustrates this structure in terms of four narrative blocks (consistent with his published work) but only three major poems (and no epilogues). Exodus 15:1–18, which appears neither with the phrase “in the last days” or a Messianic prophecy, is absent.

**Elements of the Pentateuch's Composition  
(Cross-referencing)**



Evidently, Sailhamer gave extensive thought to the structure of the Pentateuch even to the point of revising earlier proposals that he had probably shared in class.<sup>39</sup>

Another striking example arises from his discussion of Hittite treaties

<sup>38</sup> Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 323, would later describe the compositional strategy of Gen 1–11 as “extend[ing] through the whole of the Pentateuch.” See also pp. 34–36. For earlier published syntheses, see *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 35; *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 210; “Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon,” 89–106.

<sup>39</sup> The two diagrams in this paragraph were re-created by Alysha Clark based on photos of the originals.

in relation to biblical covenants in some earlier class notes probably from his UCLA days (e.g., Box 13, Folders 2, 6, 46). In the summary paragraph of a five-page document on “Covenant Forms in Israel,” Sailhamer writes, “Israel enjoyed a special relationship with God in which God was the Great King and Israel was His obedient vassal” (Box 13, Folder 2). This document also points out similarities between suzerain-vassal treaties and the Mosaic covenant (Exod 19–24), the book of Deuteronomy as a whole, and the covenant renewal at Shechem in Josh 23–24. Though this has been commonly done by evangelical OT scholars, this is surprising for Sailhamer because of the emphasis in his published work on the biblical text as the “inspired locus of divine revelation.”<sup>40</sup> Obviously, his use of such extra-biblical background information in this way in his earliest class notes is inconsistent with this emphasis in his published work, which came later.

Before concluding that Sailhamer contradicted himself on this issue, the timing of the publication of Hans Frei’s *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* in 1974 and its influence on Sailhamer must be taken into account.<sup>41</sup> Twenty years after its publication in an article for *Criswell Theological Review*, he recollected,

As I now look back on it, the point where my biblical “cosmic map” was “almost lost” was at the point where the idea entered my head that the study of ancient near East history would help me understand the Bible. Thus it was to understand the Bible that I went off to study the ancient Near East. For me personally it was a very fortunate thing indeed that the same year I entered graduate school, Yale University Press saw fit to publish a book written by Hans Frei entitled *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. It was that book which rescued my biblical “cosmic map.”<sup>42</sup>

In light of his early class notes, which not only cited Mendenhall’s work on Hittite treaties but at other points also used extra-biblical historical background for exegesis,<sup>43</sup> it seems that the implications of Frei’s

<sup>40</sup> E.g., Sailhamer, “Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History in Biblical Interpretation,” *JETS* 44 (2001): 193–206.

<sup>41</sup> Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1974).

<sup>42</sup> Sailhamer, “Cosmic Maps, Prophecy Charts, and the Hollywood Movie, A Biblical Realist Looks at the Eclipse of Old Testament Narrative,” *CTR* 7.2 (1994): 73.

<sup>43</sup> See the discussion of barrenness in the ancient world related to Sarah and Hagar in Gen 16 in Box 13, Folder 2. See also Box 13, Folders 12–13. Box 13, Folder 59 contains a syllabus for an Old Testament Introduction class printed on Bethel Seminary scratch paper and which has the 1981 edition of John Bright’s,

work, which Sailhamer’s comments above suggest that he had read not long after its publication, gradually but steadily impacted his thinking. Indeed, his later notes as well as his published work move away from the use of Hittite treaties to explain biblical covenants.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, Box 13, Folder 8 largely contains materials related to Hans Frei’s *Eclipse*. Included is a manuscript of a paper on Frei by Marvin Anderson in January 1982 for a Bethel Seminary faculty seminar. Also included in this folder are Sailhamer’s handwritten notes on binder paper on Frei’s *Eclipse*, which seem to have been the basis for his unpublished typewritten response to Frei’s book also contained in this folder. Given that it was typed on Bethel Seminary scratch paper and cites Roland Barthes in a 1980 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, this response likely came from the same general period as the faculty seminar on the same topic. Though I cannot be sure without further evidence, perhaps it was around this time that Frei’s ideas further solidified in Sailhamer’s thinking.

A gradual impact of Frei’s *Eclipse* on Sailhamer’s thinking can also be detected in his earlier notes on “Basic Hermeneutical Principles” (Box 13, Folder 13). The fifth of these principles is that Scripture “should be interpreted in the light of its historical and cultural context.” The sixth principle is that it “should be interpreted in the light of the unified advancing of the divine revelation.” He also allows for “rare” instances of *sensus plenior*. In early handwritten notes for a Christology course in Fall 1974 (Box 14, Folder 15), Sailhamer even has eight pages of notes on typology.<sup>45</sup>

*A History of Israel*, as a required textbook.

<sup>44</sup> See *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 281–96, which in its extended discussion of Exod 19–24 only passingly refers to a possible parallel between the stone tablets in Exod 24:12 and the fact that “some treaty documents in the ancient world required two copies.” There are no other references to ancient treaties in this section of his book, though see also his reference to the suzerain-vassal relationship on p. 27 and his use of ANE law codes on p. 64. Relatedly, Sailhamer notes that the plastering of stones prior to writing on them in Deut 27:2 “was a common method for public monuments in ancient Canaan” and provides the appropriate citation (p. 470). George Mendenhall’s “Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 17.2 (1954): 26–46, is cited on p. 63 but with reference to the distinction between “legal action” (or “technique”) and “legal policy,” not with reference to Hittite treaties (see Mendenhall’s “Covenant Forms in Israelite Traditions,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 17.3 [1954]: 50–76). Discovered two years after the publication of these articles by Mendenhall, the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon have also played a role in this discussion (see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 6–9).

<sup>45</sup> Four pages are written on “banana paper” and cite R. T. France, and the other four are on binder paper and cite S. L. Johnson (i.e., S. Lewis Johnson).

Although the standard practice of the grammatical-historical method, the use of the category of progressive revelation for interpretation, *sensus plenior*, and traditional typology have been common among evangelical scholars for some time, Sailhamer's published work is notable for its departure from all of these. While still holding to the grammatical-historical method, he believed that "grammatical" and "historical" were not two different aspects of this hermeneutical method as has become the consensus ("grammatical and historical") but are one and the same ("grammatical, namely/or historical").<sup>46</sup> Neither does his published work invoke progressive revelation as a unifying framework for biblical theology, nor *sensus plenior* or traditional typology with respect to the Messiah in the Old Testament. The likely reason for this is that the thrust of so much of his scholarly work is to show exegetically and compositionally that Messiah is indeed central to the Pentateuch and the Tanak. Although his early class notes from when he first started teaching as a graduate student in 1974 say, "OT = God centered; NT = Christ centered" (Box 13, Folder 6), in an interview with *Christianity Today* in January 2010 about his last work and magnum opus, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, Sailhamer at the end of his career said,

The Old Testament is about ancient history. But that is not its meaning. Its meaning is Christ. Saying that also calls for a great deal of caution. In my book, I take the view that the whole of the Pentateuch is about Christ, but that doesn't mean that Christ is in the whole Pentateuch. Finding Christ in the Pentateuch means learning to see him when he is there rather than trying to see when he is not there.<sup>47</sup>

Even with his word of "caution," it is obvious that Sailhamer's view of Messiah in the Pentateuch and the OT developed significantly since the time he started teaching.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Sailhamer, "Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History in Biblical Interpretation," 193–206. In *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 105, he likewise affirms, "In Ernesti's view, 'historical' meant simply the 'grammatical' meaning of the words of Scripture. The 'historical' meaning was the 'grammatical' sense."

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/januaryweb-only/12-11.0.html> (accessed 9/27/17).

<sup>48</sup> While on the faculty of Golden Gate, Sailhamer taught a summer course in 2008 for Western Seminary entitled "Messiah in the Old Testament" (electronic copy of syllabus in author's possession). The course description begins, "The Old Testament, the first three quarters of the Bible, is the gospel of the Messiah. The most important feature of the Old Testament is the way it depicts the nature of our relationship with God and His promised Messiah." A year earlier in 2007, he

Another area in which development of Sailhamer's thought can be observed is in the search for the best terminology to describe his hermeneutical methodology. In notes for an Introduction to Hebrew Exegesis course at Trinity in Spring 1985, he referred to the "Grammatical/Syntactical Study of the Old Testament," and the "Literary/Historical Study of the Old Testament." In one place, he crossed out "Historical" in the latter and replaced it with "Grammatical," so that the phrase then reads "Literary/Grammatical Study of the Old Testament." Sixteen years later in 2001, he characterized his own approach as aligned with the grammatical-historical method as Ernesti understood it.<sup>49</sup> Relatedly, Sailhamer's 1987 article for the *Journal of the Evangelical Society* describes his "canonical approach" to the OT that employs the "tools of compositional analysis."<sup>50</sup> His later published<sup>51</sup> and unpublished material (see Box 2, Folder 11–13, 15, 16), however, preferred the term "compositional."<sup>52</sup> As one more example, his early notes favorably employ "typology" (Box 14, Folder 15; see above), and his same 1987 *JETS* article refers to a "typological hermeneutic found within the Torah [that] is picked up and carried along not only by later Biblical writers but also by those who were responsible for the final shape of the OT canon."<sup>53</sup> Significantly, he also argued that "such a hermeneutic was not foreign or out of step with the final composition of the Pentateuch. On the contrary, in substance it is at one with that of the author of the Pentateuch." Several years later in his *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (1992), he instead uses the terminology, "narrative typology."<sup>54</sup>

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had taught another summer course for Western Seminary, entitled "Jesus and His Bible: A Christian Theology of the OT" (photocopy in author's possession). Its course description includes, "To understand the Old Testament is to understand the Bible and the Gospel. *To misunderstand the Old Testament is to misunderstand the Bible and the Gospel*" (emphasis original).

<sup>49</sup> Sailhamer, "Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History in Biblical Interpretation," 193–206.

<sup>50</sup> Sailhamer, "The Canonical Approach to the Old Testament," *JETS* 30 (1987): 307–8.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., "Biblical Theology and the Composition of the Hebrew Bible," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, 25–37.

<sup>52</sup> Although his *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (1995) is subtitled, "A Canonical Approach," he remarked to me in personal conversation that he wanted the term "compositional" but was rebuffed by the publisher.

<sup>53</sup> Sailhamer, "The Canonical Approach to the Old Testament," 307–8.

<sup>54</sup> Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 37–44 (see also his positive use of "typological" on pp. 31, 126). Also, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 295. On p. 155, he refers to an "inner typology" in the Balaam oracles.



Likewise, although still distinguishing his views from traditional typology,<sup>55</sup> he refers in *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* to “a kind of typological pattern of thinking” that links Balaam’s second and third oracles (Num 23:18–24; 24:3–9).<sup>56</sup>

The development of Sailhamer’s thought in certain areas over the course of his career should be expected for a scholar of his stature. On the other hand, it should also be observed that other areas of his thinking remained consistent during these same years. For example, in Box 13, Folder 2, he comments in his early class notes concerning the phrase traditionally translated “formless and void” in Gen 1:2 (*tobu wabohu*), “It is very questionable, however, whether, the terms used here [*tobu wabohu*] do, in fact, describe a chaotic condition.” This is consistent with what he says in *Genesis Unbound* and his other published work. Likewise, his meditating position on the identity of the seed of the woman in Gen 3:15 is consistent in both his early class notes and his published material.<sup>57</sup> Granting his early allowance for “rare” instances of *sensus plenior*, he also seems to have always held to “only one author intended meaning” (Box 13,

<sup>55</sup> See Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 81, 228, 515, 521, 606. Through a text search of the eBook edition of this work, I did not find the phrase “narrative typology” or “inner typology.”

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>57</sup> In handwritten notes on Gen 3:15 in Box 13, Folder 2, he calls the identity of the seed “not clear” until the coming of Christ. In later printed notes in Box 13, Folder 3, he cautions against finding “too much or too little” in Gen 3:15. He takes the seed as collective but with “a hint, a promise, that such a redeemer is yet to come.” In *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 108, he remarks concerning a “puzzling yet important ambiguity: Who is the ‘seed’ of the woman? It seems obvious that the purpose of verse 15 has not been to answer that question, but rather to raise it. The remainder of the book is, in fact, the author’s answer.” On the previous page, he similarly stated, “The woman’s ‘seed’ is certainly intended to be understood as a group (or individual) which lies the same temporal distance from the woman as the ‘seed’ of the snake does from the snake itself.” Likewise in *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 321–23, he argues that the “he” in Gen 3:15 is ambiguous in the immediate context but specified as the Messianic king by other poems in the Pentateuch (see also pp. 587–90). Relatedly, on p. 9 of a set of class notes in our possession from July 2005 entitled “A Conversation with an Echo,” Sailhamer writes, “The light that is cast from Genesis 3:15 and refracted throughout the rest of the OT, cast [sic] a picture of the pledge of a coming Redeemer who is fatally wounded when he crushes the head of the serpent.” In *Meaning*, 239, he accordingly discusses Gen 3:15, Gen 49, Isa 63, and Dan 7 together. Similarly, in a 2009 lecture in Fullerton, CA entitled “Paul’s Use of the Old Testament” (recording in author’s possession), he remarked at the 30:31 mark, “John 3:16 is written in Genesis 3. Gen 3:1[5] is John 3:16.”

Folder 13). Accordingly, he writes in *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, “in the OT there is a divine intent. . . . That intent, as I understand it, is the same as the human author. In my approach to the OT, I always assume that what its human author intended to say is the same as what God intended. If we understand the human author’s intent, we will know what God intended.”<sup>58</sup>

### Areas for Further Research

The preceding gleanings from the John H. Sailhamer papers are just that: gleanings. As such, they are a mere sampling of what these papers might reveal about Sailhamer’s life and scholarship. It would be both impossible and egregiously reductionistic for the relatively brief discussion in this essay to attempt to encompass all the material in his papers. Indeed, I make no claim whatsoever of that sort and believe that much more can be said even about those portions of his papers that I looked at more closely. At the same time, in the process of my work, I became aware of areas of further research in the John H. Sailhamer papers. I desire to pass them along to my readers not as a restrictive program but rather as an aid and time-saver to future researchers who would like a few ideas on where to start. Those who would like to start from scratch or take a fresh look at these papers from their own perspective are of course welcome to do so.

One area for future research would be a more detailed consideration of the development of Sailhamer’s hermeneutical methodology over the course of his career. As noted above, his papers contain class notes on hermeneutics from when he first started teaching (e.g., Box 13, Folder 13), his time at Trinity (e.g., Box 1, Folder 21), and towards the end of his career for a Fall 2006 course at Southeastern (Box 2, Folder 13). There are still more materials in his papers that deal with hermeneutics but are not part of class notes devoted specifically to this topic. Each of these treatments of hermeneutics in his papers, along with his published work, provide a “snapshot” of his hermeneutical method at various points in his career and could be analyzed for its development. Another area for future research would be Sailhamer’s work on Hebrew syntax. Although he published on this topic,<sup>59</sup> his papers also include various versions of his own

<sup>58</sup> Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 69.

<sup>59</sup> Sailhamer, “A Database Approach to the Analysis of Hebrew Narrative,” *MAARAV* 5–6 (Spring 1990): 319–35. See also, “2 Samuel 13:1–4 [sic; should be 12:1–4] and a Database Approach to the Analysis of Hebrew Narrative,” in *Bible et Informatique: Interprétation, Herméneutique, Compétence Informatique* (Paris: Champion, 1992), 99–122.

unpublished notebook on Hebrew syntax that he distributed to his students. Also included in his papers are printouts of various passages whose clauses have been tagged according to the system he developed. Much of this kind material can be found in Boxes 1–2. These printouts are reflective of his own extensive databases that may yet be on one of his hard drives. Other areas for future research include his thought on books in the Bible that he did not publish extensively on but are represented in his papers, such as Habakkuk, Psalms, and Isaiah. Lastly, those who are interested in his latest work might also search his files for draft portions of *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* that were abbreviated or left out due to the manuscript being too long by about 300 pages.<sup>60</sup> In addition to the areas for further research that I am aware of, there is no telling what other fruitful topics are awaiting discovery.

### Conclusion

We offer the above in hopes that it accomplishes its provisional purpose of assisting and encouraging further research in the John H. Sailhamer papers at Southeastern Seminary. Perhaps the one and only rule of thumb for those who research the work of John H. Sailhamer is that in one sense there can be no true experts on John H. Sailhamer. The only expert, strictly speaking, was himself. A corollary, as his students can attest, is that no one can speak for Dr. Sailhamer except for Dr. Sailhamer. Ever wary of being misunderstood, he was at the same time constantly refining his ideas. When trying to understand such a creative, dynamic, and deep thinker who could also deploy his ideas with rhetorical flourish, we need to take the time to understand what he means, expect his ideas to develop over time, and allow for his use of memorable ways of communicating his material. This involves the common practice of giving a person the benefit of the doubt, but in Sailhamer's case it sometimes also involves the laborious effort of reading what he read, even if it is lengthy and/or in a foreign language. While these papers do not tell us what he would have said on topics that he never addressed, they do tell us more about what he did say at certain times through written formats besides his published work. Ultimately, I pray for their proper use unto a deeper understanding of the Scriptures that he so loved. His life verse, Joshua 1:8,

consists of an exhortation that we would do well to heed, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, and you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it, for then you will prosper your way and then you will succeed.”

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<sup>60</sup> Patty Sailhamer, “Biography of John H. Sailhamer,” xv, refers to “editing to reduce his thousand-page manuscript to its final size of over 700 pages.” See the third page of his class notes for a hermeneutics course at Southeastern (Box 2, Folder 13), which refers to “[t]he subtitle of this book, ‘An Exegetical Discussion of the Torah as Scripture,’” a possible reference to a draft of what became *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*.