

Who Wrote the Books of Moses?

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Houghton Lake UMC

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Good Morning.

Slide 1 Black

Let the record show that this is the last time that I'm going to fill in for Pastor Cal. And that's because I'm not certified to provide pulpit supply for Owosso. (Pastor Cal Long was recently reappointed to Owosso 1st UMC and is no longer serving in Houghton Lake.)

And let the record also show that this time Cal didn't even make the request himself. Instead he called the chair of SPRC and had her ask me.

And when she said, "Honey, Pastor Cal wants you to give a sermon in June," how could I possibly say no. (Sue Duford, my wife, is the SPRC chair.)

This is the fourth time that I've had the privilege of being in this pulpit, and I have to admit, this one is the hardest. Not because Cal is leaving, but rather because there was no obvious subject matter for today.

At the time of Pentecost a couple of years ago, I made reference to the liturgical calendar for the Christian Church, which --- up to now --- has served me quite well.

Slide 2 Calendar

This is how the calendar looks. There are five seasons, beginning with Advent, followed by Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter.

Then we have Pentecost, and the remainder of the Church year, which is identified as Ordinary or Counted Time, which continues until we reach Advent again. As I said, up to now I've been fortunate.

Slide 3 Calendar: add Jan16

The first time Pastor Cal asked me to speak was on January 16th of '05. That put us in the season of Epiphany. But it also turned out to be the Sunday celebrating Christian unity. So I took that opportunity to cover the two-thousand-year history of the Christian Church --- in twenty minutes.

Slide 4 Calendar: add type

Slide 5 Calendar: add May27

Slide 6 Calendar: add type

My next call to give a sermon came on May 27th of 2007. Fortunately, that turned out to be the Sunday after Pentecost, so we were able to discuss the meaning of Pentecost --- and how it is celebrated around the world.

Slide 7 Calendar: add May18

Slide 8 Calendar: add type

Last year's invitation came on May 28th. And while it came during ordinary time, it was also Trinity Sunday --- giving us the chance to explore the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Slide 9 Calendar: add Jun28?

Today, we are further into Ordinary Time, actually the 4th Sunday after Pentecost. And what does the liturgical calendar give us for this date?

Zip. Zilch. Nada. No historical events. No feasts or celebrations. No specific exhortations.

So, we are without a specific theme or message for the day. I discussed this with Pastor Cal and he concurred. He did suggest that I might use the opportunity to provide a personal testimony.

You'll probably be pleased to know that I've decided against that. The Lord has certainly blessed me, but it has been a perpetual blessing. No highlights reel or personal breakthroughs, just a constant source of spiritual guidance and comfort. We should all be so blessed.

So I looked to the previous sermons for some inspiration. I did receive several positive comments after last year's message on the mystery of the Trinity --- so today I bring you another mystery --- Who wrote the Books of Moses?

Slide 10 Who wrote...

At first, this might look like a trick question --- like who's buried in Grant's tomb.

But the question as to who wrote the Books of Moses is actually one of the oldest puzzles in the world. What we are talking about are the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Slide 11 Books of Moses

These Books are also known as *The Book of Laws*; the *Pentateuch*, from Greek, meaning "five scrolls;" or the *Torah*, which is Hebrew for "instruction."

The tradition is that these were written by Moses, but nowhere in the text does it say that he was the author.

In fact, challenges to his authorship go back 900 years.

Slide 12 Yashush

In the eleventh century a Jewish court physician in Spain by the name of Isaac ibn Yashush first raised the issue. He pointed out that a list of Edomite kings that appears in Genesis 36 included kings who lived long after Moses was dead.

Yashush suggested that the list was written by someone who lived after Moses.

Slide 13 add Bonfils

But this was only the beginning. In the fourteenth century, in Damascus, the Rabbi Joseph Bonfils picked up the same issue and wrote: “And this is evidence that this verse was written in the *Torah* later, and Moses did not write it; rather one of the later prophets wrote it.”

But the challenges were not limited to those within the Jewish faith. In the fifteenth century, Alphonsus Tostatus, bishop of Avila, stated that certain passages, notably the account of Moses’ death, could not have been written by Moses. It was suggested that Moses’ successor Joshua wrote this account.

Slide 14 Tostatus

In the sixteenth century, Andreas van Maes, who was a Flemish Catholic, suggested that a later editor inserted phrases or changed the name of a place to its more current name so that readers would understand it better. As a result van Maes’ book was placed on the Catholic Index of Prohibited Books.

Slide 15 add van Maes

By the seventeenth century some were suggesting that Moses did not write the majority of the *Pentateuch*.

Slide 16 Hobbes

The British philosopher Thomas Hobbes collected numerous cases of facts and statements through the course of the Five Books that were inconsistent with Mosaic authorship.

Eventually it got to the point where some were suggesting that Moses did not write any of the Five Books. The first to say so explicitly was a French Calvinist by the name of Isaac de la Peyrere. His book was banned and burned.

Slide 17 add Peyrere

Of course, the challenges did not stop there, and today the challenge to Moses' authorship even has a name --- the Documentary Hypothesis.

Slide 18 Doc Hyp

Its proponents are linguists and scholars who have studied early documents written in Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew. They base their assertion that Moses did not write the *Pentateuch* on this evidence:

Slide 19 add evidence

First --- anachronisms, that is the descriptions of people and events that were not appropriate to the time of Moses.

Second --- point of view, that is writing as an observer instead of the speaker --- "Moses did this" instead of "I did this."

Third --- style, that is differences in writing style within the Books.

And finally --- doublets, stories that are described twice in the Bible.

Not only do the proponents challenge Moses as the author, but they offer us alternative writers --- not by actual names, but by code names.

The first is **J**, who refers to God as Jahweh and focuses on Judah.

Slide 20 J E P D

The second is **E**, who refers to God as Elohim and focuses on Biblical Israel.

The third is **P**, who is interested in the priesthood of Aaron and focuses on laws, lists and dates.

And finally we have **D** who is interested in the Shiloh priesthood and focuses almost entirely on the addresses delivered by Moses to the people.

And these writers apparently wrote at different times: **J** at about 950 BC; **E** at about 750 BC; **P** at about 450 BC, and **D** at about 625 BC.

Slide 21 add dates

Now this is the simple version. There are those who suggest that there were really two or more **J**'s --- **J₁**, **J₂** and maybe **J₃** --- and there were most certainly two **D**'s --- **D₁** and **D₂**.

Slide 22 J1,J2,J3,D1,D2

It's beginning to sound like the children's TV show Bananas in Pajamas B1 and B2.

So the authorship of the Five Books is an intriguing issue. But the question for us is: Does it really matter?

Slide 23 Who wrote...

As Christians, I believe that it does matter. Our faith says that the Bible was written by men, but under divine inspiration.

We know who Moses was --- and Isaiah --- and Malachi --- and Matthew --- and Paul --- and John.

And we believe that their writing was inspired by God.

We don't know who **J** was --- or **P** --- or **D₁** --- or **D₂**. We don't know that they were divinely inspired.

And while it doesn't say explicitly in the Bible that Moses was the author of the Five Books, the NIV Study Bible does offer some insight:

Slide 24 NIV quote

“The Bible itself suggests Mosaic authorship, however a certain amount of later editorial updating does appear to be indicated.”

And the NIV also refers directly to the Documentary Hypothesis when it says:

Slide 25 NIV quote

“During the last three centuries many scholars have claimed to find in the *Pentateuch* four underlying sources. However, this view is not supported by conclusive evidence, and intensive archeological and literary research has tended to undercut many of the arguments used to challenge Mosaic authorship.”

Now --- faced with two dissenting views --- what are we to believe?

Slide 26 Who wrote...

Not surprisingly, I tend to support the position of the NIV.

Now, Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew are all Greek to me --- and I'm certainly no Biblical scholar --- but I'll try to address the "evidence" cited in the Documentary Hypothesis.

First, we ought to determine if Moses was, in fact, a writer.

We learn in Exodus that Moses was born at a time when the Egyptian Pharaoh had commanded that all male Hebrew children born be killed by drowning in the river Nile.

Jochebed, the wife of the Levite Amram, bore a son and kept him concealed for three months. When she could keep him hidden no longer, rather than deliver him to be killed, she set him adrift on the Nile River in a small craft of bulrushes coated in pitch.

The Pharaoh's daughter spotted the baby in the basket and had her handmaiden fetch it for her. Moses' sister, Miriam, then came forward and asked the Pharaoh's daughter if she would like a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby.

Slide 27 Child in basket

Thereafter, Moses' real mother, Jochebed, was employed as the child's nurse. When he grew older, he was brought back to the Pharaoh's daughter and became her son, and a younger brother to Rameses II, the future Pharaoh of Egypt.

Since he was adopted into the Egyptian royal family, it is only natural to expect that he would be educated and taught to read and write.

And, in fact, this is reflected in the story of Moses found in Acts 7: 20-22:

Slide 28 Acts 7; 20-22

“At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. *Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.*”

So we know that Moses was educated. But did he write the Five Books --- and was this writing divinely inspired?

Throughout the *Pentateuch*, it becomes clear that Moses is recording what happens --- often at the specific direction of God.

In Exodus 24: 3-4 we read about the confirmation of the Old Testament Covenant:

Slide 29 Ex 24:3-4

“When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the LORD has said we will do.’ Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.”

We are also told in Exodus 34: 27-28 that Moses wrote down the Ten Commandments:

Slide 30 Ex 34:27-28

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant --- the Ten Commandments.”

We get more evidence later in the Book of Numbers as the Israelites fled from Egypt:

Slide 31 Num 33:1-2

“Here are the stages in the journey of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt by divisions under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. At the LORD’s command Moses recorded the stages in their journey.”

There are more specific references to Moses' writing in Deuteronomy chapter 31. In verses 9 and 10 we read:

“So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them: ‘At the end of every seven years, in the year for cancelling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing.’”

In this case we see that Moses is not just writing to the Israelites of his time, he is clearly writing for future generations.

Then in verses 22-26 we read that:

“After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD: ‘Take this book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God.’”

Here we learn that Moses has written, not just a list or a log, but rather an entire book of laws.

There are lots more references to Moses' writing in the *Pentateuch*, but let me offer one more. In chapter 32 of Deuteronomy, we have the Song of Moses. It begins:

“And Moses recited the words of this song from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel...”

Slide 32 Deu 31:9-10

Slide 33 Deu 31:22-26

Slide 34 Deu 32

And some forty verses later it concludes:

“When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them, ‘Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you --- they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.’”

I think that there is an important point to make here. In this case, Moses is not just writing documents, he is reciting to his people. This is significant because it can shed some more light on the issue.

How do you define authorship? Does an author have to produce a document on a scroll or a tablet?

Let me ask you this: Who wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey?

Any student of classic literature would tell you that it was Homer --- a Greek poet who lived about 850 BC. He was either a traveling minstrel or a court singer who recited his epic poems.

He was also blind.

So he obviously didn't write down his poems. He either dictated them to a scribe ---or a scribe wrote them down as he recited them. But we still say that Homer was the author, or creator of the poems.

We need to keep this in mind as we examine the authorship of the Books of Moses.

Slide 35 Deu 32 con't

Slide 36 Homer

Slide 37 Moses

Up to now we have looked at evidence of Moses' writing that appears within the Pentateuch, but there are many other references throughout the Bible.

In I Kings 21: 8 we read that the LORD said:

“I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses gave them.”

And there are more references in the New Testament.

John writes in chapter 1, verse 45:

“Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote ---Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’”

This quote clearly indicates that the “Law” referred to here is much more than just the Ten Commandments or the log of the journey of the Israelites out of Egypt.

Slide 38 I Kings 21:8

Slide 39 John 1:45

We hear the same thing when James addresses the Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15: 21:

Slide 40 Acts 15:21

“For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

In all, there are over 30 references to Moses’ writing or Moses’ Law throughout the scriptures. He is clearly the architect of the Five Scrolls.

Slide 41 Moses

And this is attested to by many present-day Christians.

P.N. Benware states that “Moses was the human author of Genesis and the other books of the Pentateuch ... with the exception of Deuteronomy 34, which records the death of Moses. The Pentateuch, therefore, is an inspired, inerrant, authoritative document written by the man Moses.”

Slide 42 Benware quote

And Larry Richards states: “Moses wrote or supervised the writing of the bulk of the Pentateuch and ...these books are rightly viewed as both a divine revelation and an accurate, eyewitness account of events described as happening in Moses' lifetime.”

Slide 43 Richards quote

If this is the case, then why do we see in the Pentateuch the inconsistencies and the duplications that were pointed out earlier?

To understand that, we need to appreciate how the Bible was produced. The Bible we have today was not so much written as it was compiled over time.

This chart show 24 centuries of Biblical time, during which the Books of the Bible were written and assembled. The New Testament was written in the first century AD, and the Old and New Testaments were confirmed in the fourth century AD.

But the Pentateuch is much older.

Moses would have written his books 1400 years earlier, in the 13th century BC --- at about the time he was leading his people out of Egypt --- and over 200 years before the tribes were separated into Israel in the north and Judah in the south, and then exiled into Babylon.

Whether Moses wrote them all or dictated some of them to his scribes, the Books would have been written on scrolls.

Slide 44 Bible pix

Slide 45 24 centuries...

Slide 46 add type

Slide 47 add Books of Moses

Now, what do you suppose would be the shelf life of a scroll?

In Moses' time, scrolls would have been made of parchment --- a thin material made from calfskin, sheepskin or goatskin. Parchment is distinct from leather in that it is limed but not tanned --- therefore it is very reactive to changes in relative humidity, and it is not waterproof.

Even though the scrolls would probably have been protected in leather or earthen jars when not in use, eventually they would deteriorate and need to be copied.

And there would have been multiple copies of the scrolls.

In one respect, the proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis may be right. It is possible that there WERE scribes like J, E, P and D at the times that they suggest. But they didn't have to be independent authors.

They could have been scribes, assigned to copy the scrolls for Israel in the north, Judah in the south, the priestly tribe of the Levites, and the reunified church following the return of the Jews from Babylon.

Then there is the issue of language.

If Moses had written these books at about 1300 BC, they would have been written in Sinaitic, Canaanite or North Semitic scripts.

Slide 48 scroll pix...

Slide 49 24 centuries...

Slide 50 add JEPD

Slide 51 add Sinaitic etc

These originals would have to have been transliterated into Paleo-Hebrew during the time of the Divided Kingdom. “Transliterate” means to spell in the characters of another alphabet. It’s like translating, but it’s a more complex process.

Then this Paleo-Hebrew version would have been transliterated AGAIN into Old Aramaic script during the Exile.

During these projects of transliteration, scribes would very likely have updated some material --- such as place names that would have changed.

Of course, that’s not the end of the language trail.

The Books were translated into standard Hebrew sometime before they were incorporated into the Talmud in the fourth century BC. And in the third century BC, Ptolemy II commissioned a translation of the entire Old Testament into Greek --- a version known as the Septuagint.

Then eventually the Church in Rome produced a Bible in Latin in the fourth century AD, translated from the Greek and Hebrew texts. This version, which included both Old and New Testaments, was called the Vulgate. It served the Church for a thousand years until the time of the Reformation when it was translated into modern languages.

So there were many hands at work, over many centuries, preserving the Books of Moses --- and the later Books of the Bible.

Now, let’s go back to where we started --- to the “evidence” cited in the Documentary Hypothesis.

Slide 52 add Paleo-Hebrew

Slide 53 add Old Aramaic

Slide 54 add Hebrew/Talmud

Slide 55 add Greek/Septuagint

Slide 56 add Latin/Vulgate

Slide 57 Doc Hyp evidence

With what we have learned, can we address these issues ---with **Moses** as the author of the Pentateuch? I think we can.

With respect to anachronisms, the NIV has already acknowledged that some later editing was done to Moses' work in order to make it more understandable to the reader. But that does NOT exclude Moses as the author.

The most significant issue here is the description of Moses' death, and this too can be explained.

The Lord had told Moses that he would not live to see the promised land --- and Moses' people would not want to leave this issue hanging for subsequent generations. A loyal servant and scribe like Joshua would have written the epitaph at the very end of Deuteronomy to give us closure. So check that one off.

Next we have the issue of point of view. Unfortunately, we do not have the scrolls that Moses wrote. We have translations of copies that were transliterated from ancient scripts --- all accomplished over the period of a thousand years.

If Moses wrote on the original scroll, "And God said to me..." --- somewhere along the line a scribe would have noted that this should be read, "And God said to me --- meaning Moses..."

This would eventually be translated simply as, "God said to Moses..."

So writing that started out as the speaker talking about himself --- ends up looking like the writing of an observer.

Slide 58 Moses Authorship

Slide 59 add check

Slide 60 point of view

Check that one off.

The issue of style can also be explained by the series of scribes and translators. But it's possible that Moses himself contributed to this.

In most of the Books, Moses is writing to the people. But in the case of Leviticus, he is writing to the priests of Levi --- dealing primarily with issues of the law. In this case, Moses might well have employed a more formal writing style.

And this brings us to doublets. Sometime prior to the fourth century BC, someone pulled together the texts that had been used by the various groups in Israel, in Judah, and those exiled in Babylon and edited them into the Pentateuch we know today.

And in the process, they sometimes included slightly different descriptions of the same events.

And I, for one, am glad that they did.

Just like the multiple stories of Jesus --- told by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the Gospels --- they give us a much richer story than we would have had otherwise.

No one questions the multiple stories of Jesus in the Gospels. Why should we question the doublets that appear in the Pentateuch?

Now I think that we can answer the question that I posed at the very beginning.

Who Wrote the Books of Moses?

The answer seems pretty clear to me. Moses wrote the Books of Moses!

Slide 61 add 2nd check

Slide 62 add 3rd check

Slide 63 add 4th check

Slide 64 Who wrote...

Slide 65 Moses wrote...

Let us pray.

Lord, we thank you for Your Sacred Word, and for the many servants who captured it and preserved it for hundreds of generations.

We thank You for the message that it brings --- with wisdom and instructions that are just as appropriate for us today as they were for the people in Moses' time.

Help us to apply that wisdom and to follow those instructions in everything that we do and say.

And help us to share Your message with the world.

We ask this in Your name and for Your sake.

Amen.

Slide 66 Black