
FAQ

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Moses, Write the Entire Torah

J.K. McKee revised 13 August, 2019

Do you honestly believe that Moses wrote the entire Torah or Pentateuch? How could Moses have written that he was the “humblest man who ever lived,” or have written about his own death?

There are two points of view which are often espoused relating to the written origins of the Torah. Among fundamentalist Jews and Christians, it is believed that the Written Torah that exists, Genesis-Deuteronomy, was entirely written by Moses himself, and has been preserved perfectly since the Ancient Israelites were in the wilderness. The exact opposite of this, believed by liberal Jews and Christians, is that the Torah was compiled after the Babylonian exile, by the Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly (P) classes of, or sources from, Israelite society. This theory, commonly called the JEDP documentary hypothesis, advocates that Moses did not write the Torah, but rather these writings are attributed to Moses and that the Torah as it exists today is largely a product of the post-Babylonian exile. The majority in the Messianic movement believe that Moses wrote the entire Torah, whereas most in liberal Judaism and Christianity believe that Moses did not write it.

We believe that Moses is the principal author or compiler of the first five books of Scripture, the Chumash or Pentateuch, himself. There are parenthetical phrases that were likely written at another date. Genesis 14:14 is a glaring example of this, appearing very early in the text, where Abraham pursues Lot’s kidnappers “as far as Dan.” This appears long before the Israelites enter into the Promised Land and ascribed geographical place names to where they settle. Some would say that since Moses was a prophet, he prophesied this into being, but that is doubtful given the fact that this is a place name, and not an event. This was obviously a textual addition added at a later date to clarify for readers where Abraham actually pursued. It does not subtract from the value of the text, nor the event that takes place, nor does it subtract from essential Mosaic composition.

Numbers 12:3 says, “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.” In the NASB and NIV translations, the text actually appears in parentheses (). Truly, if Moses did live as the most humble man on the face of the Earth, at least at the time of writing this, then Moses’ being so humble would have prevented him from ever having written this. This likewise appears to be a textual addition to the Torah from a later date. In a similar vein, the final chapter of Deuteronomy details the death of Moses and how the Lord buried him. This is something that Moses could not have written about in such detail, but it does not immediately mean that it was written many centuries later as liberal critics of the Bible often claim. The *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* notes,

“Such scholars as R.D. Wilson, Merrill Unger, Douglas Young, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and R.K. Harrison easily accept that the final chapter of Deuteronomy was likely appended by Joshua or someone else in Moses’ inner circle. This, in fact, supports the view of the continuity of the writing prophets, a theory that each successor prophet writes the last chapter of his predecessor’s book. The addition of a chapter on Moses’ funeral by another prophet is in accordance

with the custom of the day in no sense takes away from the belief that Moses was the author of everything up to that final chapter.”¹

There have been parenthetical additions to the Hebrew text of the Torah since the time of Moses. This does not subtract to the value of the text, the events that took place, and certainly not the message of the text. It also does not mean that Moses did not write or oversee the writing of the vast majority of the Torah, but it is to say that textual additions have been made along the way. We do not believe that Moses wrote that he was the humblest man on Earth, or about his own death. These were statements added by either someone in his inner circle, perhaps one of the seventy elders, or Joshua who succeeded him.

For a further discussion about these, and related issues, consult our varied FAQ entries on the composition of the books of the Bible. Also recommended is D.W. Baker, “Source Criticism,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, pp 798-805.

¹ “Pentateuch, Mosaic Authorship of,” in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 587.