

Beginnings: A Walk Through Genesis

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## Who Wrote Genesis?

The book of Genesis does not internally identify its author, nor does any other book of the Bible explicitly name the author of Genesis. The other books in the Torah connect Moses as their author and the Torah is typically treated as a complete unit. Therefore, and with good reason, Moses is called the author.

Scholarship in the last century has tried very hard to divide the sources of the Pentateuch (JDEP, source criticism).

So what are the options?

### 1. JEDP

- a. Also called the documentary hypothesis or the Wellhausen hypothesis after the guy that dreamed it up.
- b. The idea is that the Pentateuch is made up of a collection of documents, which were at one time independent and complete narratives of themselves and were subsequently combined into the current form we have by redactors (editors).
- c. This view had prominent support in the 18th and 19th centuries, however, today it is only held by the liberalist of critics.

### 2. Moses wrote Genesis and the Pentateuch on his own

#### a. Internal Evidence

- i. 2 Chronicles 25:4 | *But he did not put their children to death, according to what is written in the Law, in the Book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, "Fathers shall not die because of their children, nor children die because of their fathers, but each one shall die for his own sin."*

- ii. Ezra 6:18 | *And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their divisions, for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.*
- iii. Nehemiah 13:1 | *On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people.*
- iv. From the New Testament it seem rather clear that Jesus and the early church connected much of, if not all, of the Torah with Moses.
  - 1. Matt 19:7
  - 2. Matt 22:24
  - 3. Mark 7:10
  - 4. Mark 12:26
  - 5. John 1:17
  - 6. John 5:46
  - 7. John 7:23

b. Problems with Mosaic Authorship

- i. There are a variety of things in the Pentateuch which Moses simply could not have known. The most prominent would be the account of his death in Deut 34. Some have tried to say Moses penned this prophetically, however, the support for this is scant and thus makes this idea very strained.
- ii. In Genesis 14 we have another example. This chapter concerns a raid by a group of four Kings (vs 8). The story is an account of how these kings took Lot (who is Abraham's nephew). When Abraham hears about this verse 14 tells us *When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.*
- iii. Longman points out that it is very easy to read over a small detail in this story. The city of Dan is named after Abraham's great-grandson (Judg 17-18). The city existed during Abraham's time period, however, we have historical evidence that the name of the city was Laish. Someone changed the name so later generations could understand exactly where this place was.

iv. There are certainly other details like these that are indications of a post-Mosaic activity.

### 3. Other Sources

- a. There is evidence as we have just talked about that parts of Genesis were written after the death of Moses.
- b. There is also evidence of sources that were written prior to Moses as well. Before we get to that though we must remember that the contents of Genesis is a narration from the point of creation to the death of Joseph. It is very clear that Moses was not present for all of these events and happened long before Moses was born.
- c. The clearest evidence of other sources are found in the so called *toledot* formulas. These are the sentences that begin with a specific Hebrew phrase. In our English text we would see the phrase as:
  - i. These are the generations of (ESV)
  - ii. This is the account of (NASB, NIV)
  - iii. This is the history of (NKJV)
- d. This phrase is always followed by a family name (with the exception of Gen 2:4). The person mentioned is not necessarily always the main character, however, serves as the beginning point of the section of the book.
- e. There are a total of 11 formulas that were likely original sources passed down the generations and included in the final book.

i. Heaven's and earth (2:4)

ii. Adam (5:1)

iii. Noah (6:9)

iv. Noah's Sons (10:1)

v. Shem (11:10)

vi. Terah (11:27)

vii. Ishmael (25:12)

viii. Isaac (25:19)

ix. Esau, who is Edom (36:1, 9)

x. Jacob (37:2)

- f. We don't know the details of transmission on these ancient sources, therefore, we aren't sure whether they were all written or some were oral and the others were written.

g. What we do know though is if Moses was the author he utilized sources in Genesis in order to learn about events that happened long before he was born.

#### 4. Multiple Authorship

a. So after looking at the evidence in the biblical text itself we can make three solid assertions:

i. The tradition of Moses writing the Pentateuch points to his role as an important, foundational figure in its composition.

ii. There most likely was editorial work after Moses.

iii. Sources most likely were available to Moses concerning the events that happened in Genesis.

b. An important thing to note in the idea of compilation is that it in no way diminishes the work of the Holy Spirit in the process. The Holy Spirit was an infallible guide for Moses in this process of compilation and editing.

c. One man, Henry Morris, believes it was the work of those found at the beginning of the *toledot* that actually did the recording of the events. Morris' conclusion is that "it is probable that the Book of Genesis was written originally by actual eyewitnesses of the events reported therein. Probably the original narratives were recorded on tables of stone or clay, in common with the practice of earlier times, and then handed down from father to son, finally coming into the possession of Moses. Moses perhaps selected the appropriate sections for compilation, inserted his own editorial additions and comments"<sup>1</sup>...all under the work of the Holy Spirit.

#### 5. Conclusion

a. It seems best to affirm Moses' central role in the production of Genesis, while ultimately affirming its composite nature.

b. Most importantly, the authority of the text is not located in Moses but in God himself. Moses' words are not canonical; the finished product, the book as it was when the OT canon came to a close, is.w

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 30.