

An Introduction to the Books of Moses (first draft)

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First of all, Moses only wrote four books of the Bible and perhaps one psalm. Moses did not write Genesis nor did he write Job. It is certain that the book of Genesis was passed down verbally over the years; and it is likely that Job was passed down the same way.

Although there is considerable internal evidence that Moses wrote Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; there is considerable evidence that he did not write Genesis. With regards to that latter assertion, let me offer two very persuasive reasons (1) It is clear in the first few chapters of Exodus that the people of Israel—despite their being in slavery—knew about some of the events of the book of Genesis. (2) The book of Genesis is written in several different styles. This is not simply because different chapters cover different subjects, but because the actual writing styles are dramatically different. For me, the stand-out chapter is Genesis 24. I found it to be very boring to translate and comment on because it was so awfully repetitious. Only one person was cognizant of all the events of Genesis 24, that man being Abraham's most trusted servant. He happened to be a very exacting man who did not want to spare us any details, even if the recording of said details was repetitive.

Genesis (not a book written by Moses)

Now much of Christendom believes that Moses wrote Genesis and most of them believe that God, in some way, dictated it to Moses. Here is the problem. By the time Moses returns to Egypt after spending 40 years away, he is ready to lead his people. When he shows up, the people do not easily accept his authority. Now would you assert that Moses had already written the book of Genesis, even in a spiritually immature state? Was Moses used to communicating with God (Genesis would have taken time to write). Nothing whatsoever in the first four or five chapters of Exodus suggests that Moses wrote the book of Genesis. God uses prepared men and Moses was not prepared until he returned to Egypt.

Would you assert that Moses showed up with the book of Genesis in hand or that he wrote it later, when he wrote his other books? Moses has some difficulty getting his God-given authority established with the elders and people of Israel, so could he simply hand the elders the book of Genesis and say, "Hey, when you guys get a chance, read this"? That is somewhat absurd. But to claim that Moses wrote this later on, would be problematic, as the Hebrew people seem to know about the events recorded in Genesis.

I have no idea that, for most of the past 3500 years, people have pushed such an unnatural explanation for the authorship of Genesis. I have elsewhere covered this topic, but the more natural and reasonable solution is, each generation of people had their own version of the book of Genesis. That is, when Abraham came on the scene, he had, as a part of his knowledge, the first eleven chapters of Genesis (to clarify, the books of the Bible were not broken down into chapters until much later after the books were written).

The idea that this information is known is not a difficult or confusing thing to suggest. When Abraham was born, virtually all of the patriarchs, going back to the Ark, were alive on this earth. It was literally possible for Abraham in directly interaction with Shem or with Shem's sons (Shem is a son of Noah and Abraham comes from the line of Shem, which is why we call the Jewish people Semitic—that means that they are in the line of Shem).

I am not away of anyone who has taught this, but one of the notable things of Abraham's lifetime is, nearly all of the patriarchs were alive when Abraham was born, and dead by the time Abraham died. Therefore, in Abraham's life, the knowledge of what had taken place previously was available from many sources. Furthermore, given that we are so close in time to Adam, men would have had a greater mental capacity. Memorizing the first eleven chapters of Genesis is not a great mental feat today. However, in the time of Abraham, this would have been easier, given the intelligence of that era.

History was recorded accurately in the book of Genesis. However, other historic traditions were recorded as well. Therefore, we have many versions of the flood recorded in ancient histories and many versions of Genesis 6 recorded. We would expect something like this, as these are the most spectacular events post creation. It is likely that these two historic events are found in nearly every ancient history. It is recorded accurately in the Bible; and less so elsewhere.

So Abraham comes on the scene. He learns about the History of God and Man (Genesis 1–11) and, in fact, memorizes it (as some did). Then Abraham leads a life and sires sons Isaac and Ishmael (by different mothers). Abraham obviously is able to remember these events in his life. For both of his sons, over the period of their lives, Abraham speaks from memory Genesis 1–11 and then adds in his life. As Abraham grows older and Ishmael is estranged from the family, Isaac is old enough to have a few memories worth remembering and worth repeating.

My mother had perhaps 20 photo albums of our family, which she greatly treasured. What we read of the words of Abraham and Isaac is the equivalent of their photo albums. They had lives, they had experiences, and they believed it important to remember these things and to tell these things to their children.

What I want you to get from this is, what I have describes is very natural, very organic and very logical. Just as my mother kept these photo albums all these years, so Abraham and Isaac would have preserved their memories and they would have passed these memories on to later generations.

So, by the time that Jacob and Esau came along (Isaac's twin sons). Abraham, the patriarch, would stand at a gathering of his people, and read (from memory) Genesis 1–23; then his trusted servant would stand and recite Genesis 24; and then Isaac would recites Genesis 25–26. Just as a family might sit around a photo album and their mother or father tells them who all of these people are, this would have been the ancient equivalent.

This tradition was continued with the Jewish people, even in their enslavement to Egypt, so they are all aware of their history and their genetic line. So when Moses references some of the patriarchs, the elders with him don't interrupt him and say, "Who is this character Abraham that you keep talking about?"

Exodus

The book of Exodus is written over a period of perhaps a year and a half, with a conclusion added on to the end of it (Exodus 40:36–38). Such an ending could have been tacked on 2 years later or 39 years later.

Most of the events of Exodus take place over the period of no more than 1.5 years. The history covers all of Moses' life, so the overall history is perhaps 81 years. We have Moses in Egypt (age 0–40); Moses in exile (age 41–80); and Moses back in Egypt (age 81).

Moses neatly summarizes his life from age 0–80 in Exodus 1–2. It is Exodus 3 that Moses comes upon the burning bush. We do not know when exactly that Moses began to write the book of Exodus, but he started prior to Exodus 15. Exodus 15 is a song which Moses writes, having watched the army of Pharaoh drown in the waters before him. Moses writes a song, the people learn it, and then they sing it while standing at water's edge. In other words, Exodus 15 was written down, distributed and then sang by the people pretty much all in the same day. When did Moses first begin writing down his experiences? I would suggest somewhere between Exodus 3 and 15; and probably closer to Exodus 3 (in time). From that point forward, Moses recorded on paper the book of Exodus (most of which takes place over the period of a year and a half).

One of the most interesting sections of Exodus to me was where I believe that Moses repeated a narrative. We first read Moses coming before Pharaoh from the point of a human perspective; then we read about the same meeting a second time, but from the divine perspective. It is not so explained in Exodus, so one generally sees these as two different meetings with Pharaoh—meeting #1 and meeting #2.

Leviticus

The book of Leviticus is nearly all the words of God given directly to Moses (or to Moses and Aaron) and recorded. There is one short portion which is narrative, when God kills the two oldest sons of Aaron (they died the sin unto death).

The entire timeline of Leviticus is about a month.

Numbers

The book of Numbers more or less picks up where Leviticus leaves off. It is a history of Moses leading the children of Israel in the desert-wilderness. This book is about 39 years of history. Although portions of this book are directly quotations from God, most of it is narrative (but it is nowhere near as detailed as the Mosaic narrative in Exodus).

Having come to Numbers 9, it is clear that not all of this book is written in chronological order (the date given is a month prior to the date given in Numbers 1:1). The key question is, why is this book not in chronological order?

I am not yet at the point of understanding why Numbers is not in a strict chronological order.

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy takes place at the very end of Moses' life. It might take place over the period of a few weeks and possibly over the period of a few months. Moses is looking at a new generation of Hebrew people (most of the previous generation died the sin unto death in the desert-wilderness). The people upon whom Moses looks were under age 20 when leaving Egypt, and many of them (those who are under age 40) had not even been born yet. So, Moses has an audience of Hebrew people who range in age from 20 to 60 (usually younger men did not attend these gatherings). More than half of them did not live through any period of slavery to Egypt, as they were born after that period of time. The others who experienced it were children at the time (maybe some of them were slaves; likely that they were).

Moses needs for this new generation of Israelites to know Israel's history, their relationship to God, and what God expects of them. This is their preparation before the enter into the land of Canaan to take it. Moses gives them some very concentrated period of time when he is teaching, teaching, teaching.

Joshua, who is Moses' secretary and who actually wrote down what Moses dictated (we do not know exactly when this started), will add the final chapter of Deuteronomy, which is all about the death of Moses.