

Moses and the Composition of the Pentateuch
Emergence Winter Sessions 2025–26

General Observations

God can use any means he wants to produce his authoritative Word.

There is much about the composition of the Bible that we simply do not know.

Our trust in the Bible is a matter of lordship.

If what we believe about the Bible is true, then the things it says about its own authorship serve as anchor points for what we should believe.

Moses and the Composition of the Pentateuch

Five explicit places Moses “wrote” something:

- Enmity with Amalek: Exodus 17:14
- The Book of the Covenant: Exodus 24:4
- The Wilderness Itinerary: Numbers 33:2
- Deuteronomy’s legal content, curses, and blessings: Deuteronomy 31:9
- The Song of Moses: Deuteronomy 31:32

Additional places where Moses is the recipient of divine revelation:

- The first-person account of Deuteronomy 1–4.
- Introductory formulas in legal texts (e.g., “the LORD said to Moses ...”).

The second “tent of meeting” (Exod 33:7–11):

- The people’s means of “seeking the LORD” (v. 7).
 - E.g., the specificity of the manslaughter laws in Numbers 35:22.
 - E.g., the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27 and 36.
- A public process.

- “Face-to-face, as a man speaks to his friend” (v. 11).

New Testament evidence:

- Moses gave us the commandments of God.
- Something new: “Moses”/”law of Moses” = the Torah/Pentateuch
- Two interesting passages.
 - “Moses showed, in the passage about the bush” (Luke 20:37; cf. Exod 3:15)
 - “Moses gave you circumcision” (John 7:22; cf. Lev 12:3).

The plausibility of Moses as author/source:

- Scribes (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi, 1750 BC).
- The Egyptian “royal school” (*k3p*).
- Biblical Hebrew.
 - Northwest Semitic
 - Alphabetic
- Evidence for alphabetic writing of NW Semitic languages ca. 1250 BC:
 - Proto-Sinaitic: Wadi e-Hol and Serabit el-Khadem (ca. 1800 BC)
 - Other 2nd millennium evidence
 - Ugaritic (alphabetic cuneiform (ca. 1400–1190 BC): Baal Cycle, Legend of Keret, the Tale of Aqhat.
- Two caveats:
 - The Hebrew Bible was written using Phoenician-style letters.

- The language of the Hebrew Bible was updated over time.
- Amorite/Akkadian Tablets

Scholarly doubts about Moses

- Parts of the Pentateuch obviously written after Moses.
- Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis
 - J (ca. 950 BC)
 - E (ca. 850 BC)
 - D (ca. 620 BC)
 - P (ca. 570–450 BC)
- More contemporary approaches
- Some responses:
 - We should be concerned with the accuracy of the Bible, not its dates.
 - There is very little consensus in the field.
 - Dating the sources is fraught with problems.
 - The problem of diversity and unity.
 - Ignoring (stronger) evidence for earlier dating.