

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 1

Genesis: Authorship Issues

American courtrooms are charged with the responsibility of finding truth. Both sides offer witnesses and other evidence in an effort to “prove” their version of the truth. Frequently as a trial lawyer, one of my chores is to cross-examine the witnesses proffered by the opposing side, in an effort to place doubt about the accuracy of the witness’s version of events. Often, my cross-examination will begin with questions concerning the witness’s credibility. If the witness claims to be an eyewitness, then how accurate were the visual observations? Does the witness have a financial interest in the outcome? If the witness is testifying as an expert, then how strong are her or his credentials for the area in which the opinions are offered? I want to know how the expert formulated the opinions – were they spoon fed by the hiring lawyers or did the expert do proper homework?

It is always interesting to watch a jury’s reaction to these questions. Jurors are generally as interested in these areas as I am. I remember one trial where a doctor was testifying about whether or not a man had died from a heart attack. The doctor had sounded most impressive as he explained the autopsy results. After five hours of direct testimony, the other side passed the witness. The judge announced, “Your witness Mr. Lanier.”

My cross examination started with the doctor’s qualifications. I put up his *curriculum vitae* (think “resume”) and noted with some measure of appreciation that he had published some 194 articles in medical journals (a truly impressive number). The opposing doctor was pleased I had shown that to the jury, confident it enhanced his credibility.

While it did, in fact, enhance his credibility, it was only momentarily. For I then showed that *all* of his published work concerned how to read pathology slides to determine whether one had prostate cancer. He had no professional experience in detecting, diagnosing, or treating heart attacks. In fact, the last time he had ever seen anyone with a heart attack was 30 years earlier in medical school. He was a pathologist who spent all of his time in a lab reading prostate cancer slides, save for the time he spent testifying in court.

Neither I, nor the jury was too impressed with his testimony at that point. Even if he had been right with his opinions, I doubt anyone would have believed him since it was far afield from his area of knowledge and practice.

We live in an age and society where we like to know who is responsible for what we are hearing or reading. It makes a difference to us. Authorship is important.

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But, it was not always so. UCLA professor of Northwest Semitic languages, William Schniedewind, asserts that, “the importance of authorship was largely an unknown concept in the ancient Semitic world.”¹ During the time of the Old Testament’s composition, the concerns over authorship were not present. They did not assess credibility the way our courts and juries do. No doubt this is one reason why the authors are not always named in much of the Old Testament.

It creates some measure of difficulty for us as we insert our concerns and try to determine who wrote what in each Old Testament book. While subsequent editors have sometimes added authorship attributions, many times the original books do not tell us who wrote them. Scholars have worked hard to assess the evidence that is available, and there is no shortage of theories on who wrote what! Those scholars, however, are not in agreement.

For some, authorship is not important. Some are satisfied to see in Scripture, God’s hand and voice, and which human tool he used is not significant. For others, it is serious and deserving of answers.

In this lesson, we hope to set out various issues important to the authorship debate on Genesis. In the process, we must recognize both our goals and our limitations. The goals are to grow in appreciation, knowledge, and use of God’s revelation to mankind.

The limitations are fairly obvious. We are dealing here with hundreds of years of scholarship, dozens of opinions, each with a multitude of permutations, and countless books on the subject, yet we are planning on reducing our study to twenty or so pages. This limitation means that this lesson is a launching pad for further study. It cannot be a full analysis.

A second limitation is the teaching itself. While many years of study and innumerable pages of reading have gone behind preparing this lesson, it pales in comparison to the work of many others and to the materials available for study. We are arrogant if we fail to note that there are great scholars in this field who have dedicated a lifetime to studying the issues. While we do not always agree with others’ conclusions, it is not out of a claim

The first five books of the Old Testament are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books are often referred to together by different names. Scholars often call them the “*Pentateuch*” coming from the Greek for “five.” In history, some have termed these books as the “*Five Books of Moses*” under the idea that the books were either written by Moses, or at least find him as their central character. Jews call these books “*Torah*” which is Hebrew for “*Law*” Hence, the books are

¹ Schniedewind, William, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge 2004) at 7.

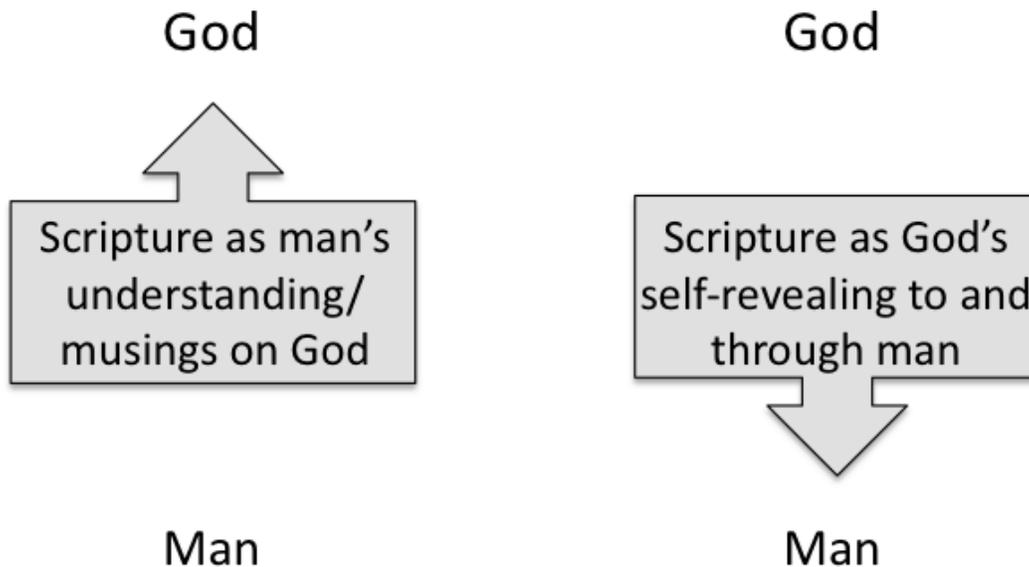
to better intelligence or greater study. Sometimes, it is from critical analysis made possible, in part, by the efforts of other scholars. Other times, it may just be a difference in opinion. Often, it stems from a different set of presuppositions, especially regarding the nature and source of Scripture.

Accordingly, we start with our perspective of Scripture for these lessons, then we chart through the factors and opinions relative to authorship for Genesis, and with an eye toward matters relevant to the first five books of the Old Testament.

PERSPECTIVE ON SCRIPTURE

In 2003, John Webster, a Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen, published a book entitled, *Holy Scripture*. In the book, he asks the question whether in the 21st century one may speak of Scripture as “Holy” with an eye toward both good religious practice and good intellectual inquiry.² We agree with Webster’s conclusion that it is not only proper to speak of Scripture as “Holy,” but it is also important to understand *why* we say so.

As we discussed last week, Scripture can be seen from two different perspectives.



One group sees Scripture “from the ground up.” This group considers Scripture to be the musings and writings of many different people expressing their thoughts and reflections on God. Diametrically opposed to this view is that which views

² Webster, John, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge 2003).

Scripture as God’s revelation to humanity.³ Rather than seeing Scripture as man’s creation, it is “a set of communicative acts which stretch from God’s merciful self-manifestation to the obedient hearing of the community of faith.”⁴

The teaching in this class falls squarely into the second group, seeing Scripture as God’s divine self-revelation. It is in this sense that we speak of “inerrancy” of Holy Scripture. As we use that term, we are stating that Scripture is perfect and without error in communicating what God chooses to communicate in the manner in which God chooses to communicate. Accordingly, scholastic efforts to determine the best text of original Scripture are supported and applauded. Also, efforts to understand the nature of the writings of Scripture and the place, time and context of their generation are important for better understanding. But, all these tools must be seen as simply that – tools.⁵

These tools are some of the means by which we better understand both *what* God has chosen to reveal as well as *how* God has chosen to make his self-revelation. As we use these tools, we must remember that the words of Holy Scripture are not simply the words of man. God has chosen to use mankind and mankind’s writings for his self-revelation. It is, however, *self*-revelation from the Creator.

FACTORS RELEVANT TO AUTHORSHIP

For thousands of years, both Church history and Jewish history have considered Genesis to be, as referenced earlier, one of five books by Moses. In the last several hundred years, scholars have questioned that claim. In trying to determine the authorship, there are a number of factors to consider before drawing any conclusions. We set out the more noteworthy factors here.

1. The claims of Scripture.

Old Testament

³ In this sense, we speak of Scripture as “Holy Scripture” or God’s word. The same principle is present in Jesus as God’s Word (capital “W”) set out in John 1 and elsewhere in Scripture. Jesus was not simply a good man reflecting a human concept of God (from the ground up). Jesus was God’s self-revelation to man (from heaven come down).

⁴ Webster at 5.

⁵ We should add that Scripture is not only divinely given, but also divinely understood. The understanding is also brought about through the work of the Divine. As St. Paul indicated, “For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Cor. 2:11-12).

What do the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy say about their author? Does any other part of the Old or New Testament attest to the authorship of Moses or someone else? In the Old Testament, as we read the first five books, we find several references to Moses writing something, but never writing the entire Pentateuch. For example, in Exodus 24:4, we read,

And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.

At first blush, this “all” might be considered the entire Old Testament to that point. Close examination, however, shows the “all” is referring to something else. Context shows this was likely a reference to the laws that God had just explained to Moses for the people.

Similarly, in Exodus 34:27 the LORD told Moses,

And the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."

We read in the next verse that what Moses wrote was not Genesis forward, but rather the Ten Commandments:

So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.⁶

Later in Numbers 33:2, we read of Moses writing down the stages of movements by the Israelites in their desert wanderings, again at God’s direction. Finally in Deuteronomy 31:9, we read of Moses writing the law (“Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests”). Scholars debate what exactly that “law” was. Some believe it was the Book of Deuteronomy; others believe it was the “substance of the law upon which the address of Moses was based.”⁷ Few scholars, if any, think it was the entire first five books of the Old Testament, even though they are, at times, called the Law (*Torah*).

⁶ See also Ex. 17:14, where the LORD instructs Moses to "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Also we read in Ex. 24 that Moses wrote down what the Lord had said to him about the covenant with Israel (this predates the Ten Commandment in Exodus mentioned in Ex. 24:12). Moses then read that book to the people. ("Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD...Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." Ex. 24:3-4, 7). Moses also had a “Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Num. 21:14), which is unknown today.

⁷ Craigie, Peter, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament) (Eerdmans 1976) at 370.

While today, we can speak of the *Torah/Law* of Moses as the first five books of the Bible, we should remember that at times, Scripture speaks of something more limited than the Pentateuch as the “Law of Moses.” In Joshua, for example, as the Jews are beginning to conquer the Promised Land, we read where Joshua built an altar of uncut stones to the LORD. There, “he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he [Moses] had written” (Josh. 8:32). Some scholars believe this to be the Ten Commandments. Others see it as something more, but no scholar of note considers this to be Joshua rewriting on the stones all of Genesis through Deuteronomy (the “*Torah/Law*”).

As we search the Old Testament past the Pentateuch, we find multiple references to the role of Moses and the “Law.” The prophets speak of the statutes and rules “Moses commanded” for all Israel (Mal. 4:4). Daniel spoke of what was “written in the Law of Moses” (Dan. 9:11, 13). The writer of Chronicles referenced “the Book of Moses” (2 Chron. 25:4); the “Law of Moses” (2 Chron. 23:18, 30:16); the “rules given through Moses” (2 Chron. 33:8); and the “Book of the Law of the LORD given through Moses” (2 Chron. 34:14). Kings similarly references the “Law of Moses” on multiple occasions (1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings. 14:6; 23:25).

The Old Testament book of Nehemiah concerns events in Israel in a time range of 445 – 420 BC. During that time, we read of Nehemiah executing some final reforms with a reference to Moses’ writing:

On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. (Neh. 13:1).

Earlier in Nehemiah 8:1, we are told that Nehemiah’s contemporary Ezra the scribe was instructed to bring “the Book of the Law of Moses.” Ezra himself has multiple similar references to matters “written in the Law of Moses” (Ez. 3:2); “written in the Book of Moses” (Ez. 6:18); as well as a scribe “skilled in the Law of Moses” (Ez. 7:6).

None of these passages change the conclusion drawn from the passages in the Pentateuch. Moses wrote some portion of Genesis through Deuteronomy, but what exactly, we cannot be sure.

New Testament.

The New Testament also speaks on the issue of Moses and the Law. Jesus makes it clear that Moses indeed was a writer of Scripture. In John 5:46-47, Jesus says,

For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?

From this passage, some scholars see Jesus meaning that Moses wrote basically all the Pentateuch, for indeed the whole Pentateuch does testify to Jesus. Of course, in that sense so does all of Scripture. Others see this as a reference to Deuteronomy 18:18, where the LORD says to Moses,

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Some other scholars see this as a reference to Jesus citing Moses as the “labeled” or “understood” author since the people assumed Moses wrote the Pentateuch.⁸ This is similar to the way Jude cites Enoch as prophesying in Jude 14 when the quote is actually from a non-Enoch written pseudepigraphal work.

Jesus also spoke of Moses as a source of Old Testament law. Jesus spoke of Moses as the giver of the law (*i.e.*, “Has not Moses given you the law?” Jn. 7:19), although that statement does not mean that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch or even all the law.

Jesus did recognize the “written” Law of Moses in many places. For example,

These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk. 24:44).

Many other times, Jesus refers to Moses as the source of the Law, which does not necessarily mean that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.⁹

Others in the gospels speak similarly. When introducing Nathaniel to Jesus, Philip calls Christ the one of whom Moses wrote “in the law” (Jn. 1:45). Other disciples questioned Jesus quoting Moses,

⁸ See Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 1.39.

⁹ For example, in Matt. 19:8 Jesus says, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” That does not mean that Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy that contains the instructions on divorce in Deut. 24:1-4. It could just as easily mean that Moses wrote the document that was placed into Deuteronomy 24. It could also mean that Moses dictated the passage to a scribe, similar to how Paul “wrote” many of his letters. See also the related passage in Mark 10:5 (“And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”). The Mark passage could also mean that Moses wrote more than the Deuteronomy legal instruction on divorce. There are some who think that the continuing verses not only explain and justify Jesus’ position, but are also to be included as something written by Moses.

And they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.”¹⁰

Again, though, these passages do not tell us that Moses is the exclusive author of the Pentateuch.

Outside the gospels, we have more indications of Moses and his writings. In Acts 15, we read about the Jerusalem church writing a letter to Gentile churches. In the letter, the elders and apostles reference that for generations, Moses “is read every Sabbath in the synagogues” (Acts 15:21). Whether this means that Moses wrote the words read or delivered the words that others wrote is uncertain.

Paul understood Moses as a source for Scripture, although he never specifically said that Moses wrote all of the Pentateuch. In Romans 10:5, Paul references Moses as writing,

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

Paul’s reference that the person who does the commandments shall live by them is from Leviticus 18:5, the third book of the Pentateuch. Later in Romans 10:19, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:21 (the fifth book of the Pentateuch) saying,

But I ask, did not Israel understand? First Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.’”

Paul referenced part of Scripture as being from Moses when he told the Corinthians, “Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts” (2 Cor. 3:5). Paul also quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 as something “written in the Law of Moses” (1 Cor. 9:9).

In the book of Hebrews, we read similar references to what Moses “said” and did (Heb. 7:14; 9:19; 12:21). We also have references to the “law of Moses” (Heb. 10:28).

Conclusion

Scripture than gives us data that Moses was writing, and that he was writing at the instruction of the Lord. Moses also relayed a great deal of information orally, including an instruction for Israel to teach its children orally and in writing (Dt. 6:4-9), yet Scripture never makes the claim that Moses physically wrote the

¹⁰ We should add that we do not assert that the questioners had infallible insight into the authorship of the Old Testament. We add this merely to show the common ideas at the time.

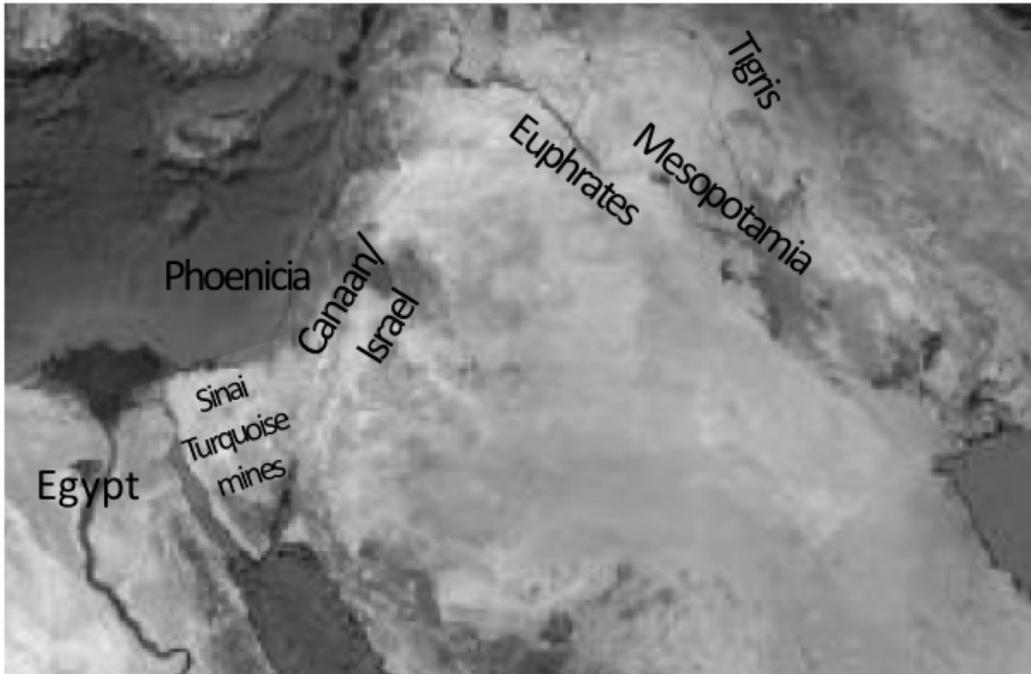
entireties of Genesis through Deuteronomy. This gives a good foundation as we consider some other relevant factors.

2. History of Writing.

Ordinary people often think of the Old Testament as written in Hebrew. Certainly, there is a great deal of the Old Testament that was actually written in Hebrew. We also know of portions written in a sister language, “Aramaic.” But was all the Old Testament written in Hebrew? Is it possible that Moses could have written in another language? Recent news media accounts reference a finding dated around 1,000 BC of the oldest known fragment of Hebrew. While we do not know for certain when Moses led the people from Egypt, it was certainly well before 1,000 BC., because that is the time of King David!

Does this mean that Moses did not write in Hebrew, or that we have just never recovered any Hebrew texts that old? Technically, we must answer that Moses did not likely *write* in Hebrew, at least not as we think of Hebrew. To understand this, we need to consider several questions. What was writing like at the time of Moses? Can we truly answer whether Moses would have written the Hebrew we have in our Hebrew copies of the Old Testament? What insights do archaeology and linguistic studies shed on this issue?

This is an area where historians and linguists have significant things to offer students of the Bible. To best understand some of the data and opinions, we need to set out a map of historic Canaan/Israel and the surrounding land:



The Promised Land of Canaan /Israel was in the middle between two of mankind's earliest civilizations, Egypt and Mesopotamia (the land between the Tigris and Euphrates). Both of these areas had writing long before the era of Moses, but in its earliest forms, the writing was not an alphabet. Symbols represented full words, not sounds or letters.

In Mesopotamia, there was “cuneiform” writing. The scribes wrote in wedge shaped symbols, with various symbols representing different words. Egyptian writing began similarly, but with pictures rather than wedge shaped symbols. The Egyptian symbols were called “hieroglyphs.” Likely in the Sinai Peninsula, around 1800 BC, a change took place. Some Semitic¹¹ speaking workers in Egyptian turquoise mines began to use a limited set of Egyptian symbols as an early alphabet rather than simply pictures for words.

The hieroglyphic pictures were used for the first sound in the picture/word rather than for the meaning of the picture. Let us use an actual example coming from the hieroglyph for water. The Egyptian symbol for the Nile/water was: . The Semitic word for water began with the sound of “m” sounding much like “*mayim*.” At some point, likely around mid-19th century BC, the picture started being used for its opening sound of “m” rather than for its meaning as “*mayim*” (“water”). By using the pictures for sounds, 20 to 30 pictures could make up unlimited words, rather than needing hundreds of pictures, one for each word. We should add that the picture of waves ultimately became the Greek and Latin “M” which we use today (still maintaining the “m” sound).¹²

Linguists call this early alphabetic writing “Proto-Sinaitic” (“Proto meaning “first” and “Sinaitic” referencing the locale of usage). There are dozens of samples from this time in and around the Egyptian turquoise mines.¹³

Dr. Ada Yardeni, with her Ph.D. in ancient Semitic languages, paleography, and epigraphy has written a wonderful book that traces the development of the Hebrew

¹¹ “Semitic” is the language group for the “Semites” – the classification of the native people in the region, including Canaan and Mesopotamia.

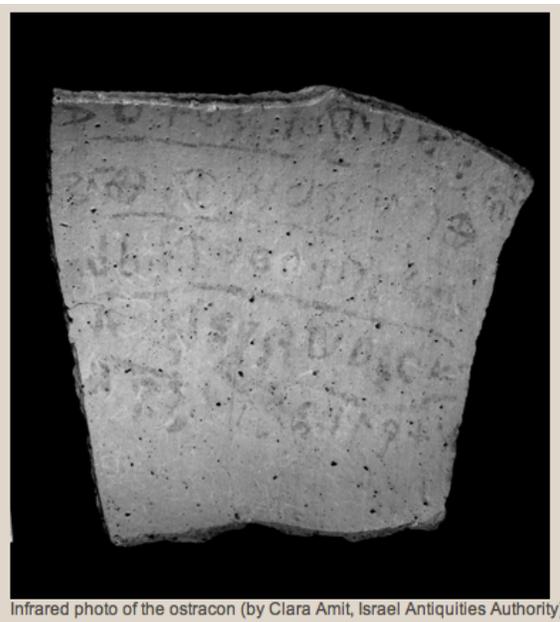
¹² An early society that took great expansive advantage of this alphabetic writing system was that of the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians were sea-faring traders who needed quick and easy ways to keep up with inventories, trading reports, prices, accounts, and other commercial activities. An alphabet came in handy! It was likely through the Phoenicians that the alphabet made its way to Greece. See Holst, Sanford, *Phoenicians: Lebanon's Epic Heritage* (Cambridge 2005) at 241-2.

¹³ See the excellent distillation of this theory in Goldwater, Orly, “*How the Alphabet was Born from Hieroglyphs*” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2010). Also see the attached chart at the end of this lesson for further details.

script from the beginning of alphabetic writing, working through the Canaanite usage of the Proto-Sinaitic letters (“Proto-Canaanite”¹⁴) and following them through to Hebrew, Aramaic, and other Semitic languages.¹⁵

Study and discovery have shown that at the time of Moses, writing was available. Furthermore, the alphabetic writing came from Egyptian working areas into the land of Canaan and beyond (Moses, of course, having ties to both Egypt and Canaan), but that writing was not what we would typically consider “Hebrew.”

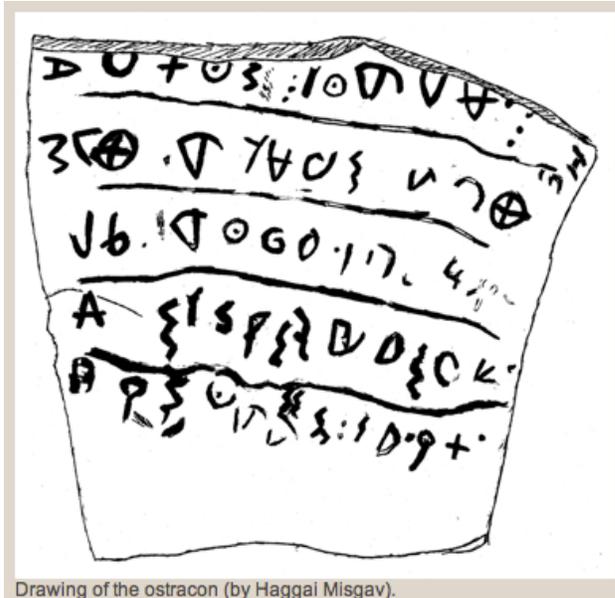
The earliest Hebrew writing that we have seems to be the recent discovery from an excavated Israeli fort near the Philistine border, referenced earlier in this lesson. The area is known today as Khirbet Qeiyafa, and was likely the ancient fort of Shaaraim which we read of in 1 Samuel 17:52 (“And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from *Shaaraim* as far as Gath and Ekron.”). Modern excavations have shown this outpost was abandoned in the early 10th century BC, so the age of the writing is easily datable to the time of David and Solomon.



By using infrared photography, the letters are a bit more readable. To get a coherent translation, scholars have had to draw in their best estimates of the letters that are too faded to read, even with the best scientific aids.

¹⁴ Some scholars use “Proto-Sinaitic” and “Proto-Canaanite” interchangeably. Likely, the miners working in Sinai were Canaanites who took the alphabet back into Canaan. While some use the words interchangeably, others like to distinguish the terms based on locale of discovery. The scripts are very much the same, save for some normal changes in the hands of writers over time.

¹⁵ Yardeni, Ada, *The Book of Hebrew Script* (Carta Jerusalem 1997).



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Some of the letters that are clear include the “aleph” which looks like an “A” turned sideways, upside-down and even right side up at various places. This was the letter that came from a hieroglyph for an ox head:



. Also visible are several letters from the water hieroglyph written sideways:

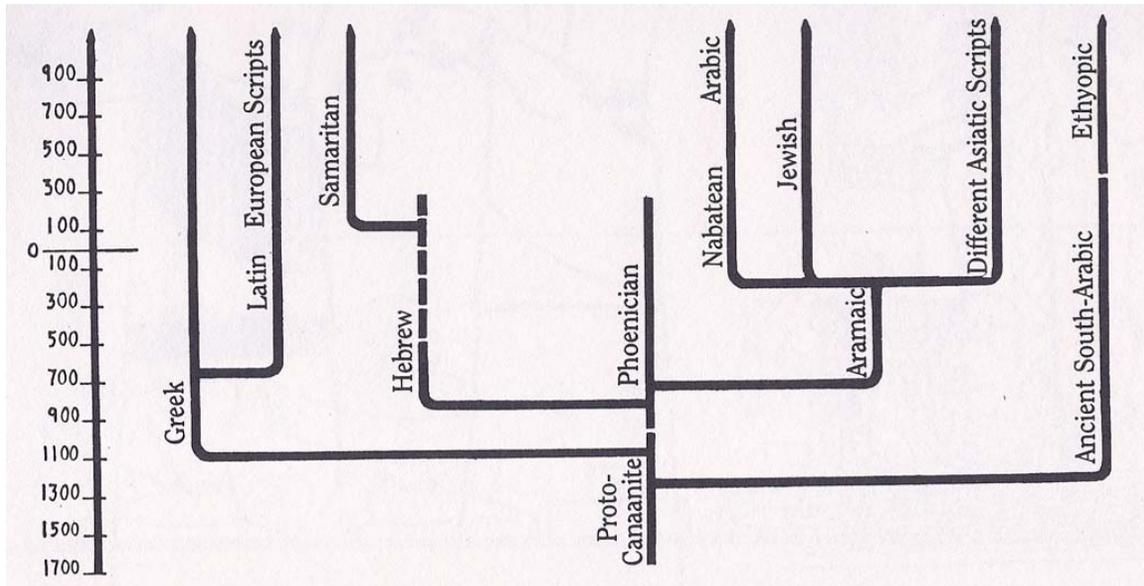


This writing was discovered in the last two years, and translations have indicated it to be early Hebrew¹⁷. The writing is in faded ink written upon a since broken piece of pottery. The letters do not look like the letters we see when we read the Hebrew documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls or the printed Hebrew texts of today. Our modern Hebrew letters, and those of the time of Christ, are from a “square script” which descended from Aramaic writing. Yardeni sets out a family tree of Semitic writing scripts¹⁸:

¹⁶ These photos and more are available for downloading on the ostracon website: <http://qeiyafo.huji.ac.il/ostracon2.asp>.

¹⁷ Although the words are hard to read, scholars have pieced together enough for several notable scholars to determine multiple Hebrew words, as opposed to some of the similar Semitic dialects known in the region. An early analysis of this is available in the March/April 2010 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* on page 54. Interestingly, although Hebrew is eventually written and read right to left, this text on the pottery is written left to right!

¹⁸ Yardeni at 3.



The letters we read in our Hebrew Bibles are from the “Jewish” branch of the tree as opposed to those found in Khirbet Qeiyafa which are on the left side as “Hebrew” script.¹⁹ Scholars place this change from “Hebrew script” to “Aramaic” becoming “Jewish script” after the time of return from exile 538 BC (the time of Ezra and Nehemiah). Possibly upon return, the Scriptures were placed into the script read by the people while in captivity in Babylon. The Aramaic script was the general one in use throughout the Middle East at the time.²⁰

Hershel Shanks, the loquacious editor of the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, adds his punch line to the find:

In short, if all this was present in the tenth century at the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa, out in the boonies, just imagine what was happening in Jerusalem.²¹

¹⁹ We need to keep distinct here language differences from script differences. There is a Hebrew language that could be written in the “Jewish script” as easily as the “Hebrew script.” The script type is a title totally distinct from language. In other words, you could write a Hebrew book entirely in Aramaic script. It would not make the writing an Aramaic writing. It would simply be Hebrew written in Aramaic. The Khirbet Qeiyafa pottery shard is written in Hebrew script *and* is written in the Hebrew language. It has significance because of both factors, but especially because it shows the Hebrew language in effect and usage by 1000 BC.

²⁰ See comments of Wurthwein, Ernst, *The Text of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans 1979) at 4-5.

²¹ Shanks, Hershel, “Prize Find: Oldest Hebrew Inscription” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2010).

We might go another step and say, if all this was present in the 11th to 10th century out in the boonies, just imagine what Egyptian-palace trained Moses might have had available a few generations earlier!

3. A consolidation of source documents.

JEDP.

If one takes most any academic work of Genesis and reads it, it will not take long before one is confronted with issues of “JEDP” and what “source documents” are combined to make up Genesis through Deuteronomy. This might seem odd to the casual Bible student, but it has been a major area of research and writing over the last several hundred years of Old Testament study.

In the early church, Moses was generally assumed the author of the entire Pentateuch except for the end of Deuteronomy, which describes the death of Moses. There were sporadic attacks against Mosaic authorship during the Middle Ages, but debate began in earnest in the 18th century.

A French physician named Jean Astruc (1684-1766) began questioning whether Moses wrote Genesis and Exodus in the form in which we read them. Responding to some prior concerns about seemingly repeated stories (“doublets”) and alternating words used in reference to God, Astruc decided that Moses wrote the two books in four different columns and that a later editor combined them into the two books (a “*Yahweh*” column, an “*Elohim*” column, a column for “repetitious materials” and a column for non-Israelite insertions).

Biblical Hebrew has multiple words for God. Among those different words, Genesis uses *Yahweh* in certain places and *Elohim* in others. Most of our English Bibles show the difference because *Yahweh* is translated as “LORD” using both large and small capitals. (The King James used “Jehovah” rather than LORD). *Elohim* is translated as “God.” We also can find “Lord” in our Old Testaments that is written in lower case letters with a capital “L.” This translates yet another Hebrew word for God, *Adonai*.

Over time, other scholars took the ideas of Astruc and developed them further, the most famous efforts coming from the German theologian Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). Wellhausen wrote extensively on a theory variously named, but typically called the “Documentary Hypothesis.”²² This theory advanced the idea that four original source materials (“documents”) were combined to produce what we consider the books of Genesis

²² Also called the “Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis.” K. H. Graf (1815-1868) preceded Wellhausen in writing on the theory. While a number of theologians approached and discussed the ideas of different sources for the Pentateuch, the theory often bears Wellhausen’s name recognizing the classic form of the theory he set out.

through Deuteronomy. Most any scholarly work on the Pentateuch will reference some aspect or later rendition of this theory speaking of the “JEDP” sections or source documents of the Pentateuch.

“JEDP” are initials for each of the four sections Wellhausen and others have posited as the sources for the Pentateuch. “J” stands for “Yahweh” (using the “Jehovah” form) and was a source that referred to God as Yahweh. “E” is supposedly the source that referred to God as Elohim. “D” stands for the legal source termed the “Deuteronomistic” source. “P” stands for the source that was established and propagated by the Priests within Israel.

Wellhausen dated these four sources well after the time of Moses. He believed that J and E were combined first. Then a later editor added D (largely the book of Deuteronomy) and finally another added the P material.

Wellhausen’s hypothesis has met with a number of variations and changes, but was still ascribed great authority in the main ideas expressed. The last three decades has seen a serious erosion of support for these theories in the scholastic communities.²³ Still, as we consider the authorship of the Pentateuch, we should pause and consider the theories in light of our presuppositions, views, and analysis.

As we assess authorship issues, we recognize the claims of Scripture that Moses was involved in writing some measure of what we see in the early books of the Bible and the Biblical Law. We also see that archaeology and linguistic studies validate that Moses could have written Genesis, albeit not necessarily in the Hebrew form in which we now read it.

Everyone accepts that Moses was not the sole author of the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy 34 sets out the death and burial of Moses along with the follow-up of Joshua. Someone else must have written that part of the Pentateuch, rather than simply inserting the narrative into the next historical book (Joshua). We know, of course, that God used many others in writing the rest of the Old Testament, including at least that portion of Deuteronomy. What we have not yet addressed is how subsequent prophets involved in Scripture would have treated Moses’ writings. These were prophets who, some named and some unnamed, both assimilated other writings and created other writings that the Jewish faithful and the church have recognized as Scripture. These are the writings that Paul called “inspired” or “God breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16).

²³ See, for example, Rendtorff, Rolf, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (JSOT Press 1990); Whybray, R. N., *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (JSOT Press 1987); Arnold, Bill T., *Genesis, The New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge 2009) at 12ff.

It certainly seems reasonable and logical to allow that not only writers but also assimilators were acting under God's divine hand, so that the Scriptures we have today are Holy Writ. In other words, many evangelicals and inerrantists flee from the idea that someone other than the obvious author might have assimilated portions of Scripture. The idea that a later editor took multiple sources and combined them into a single scroll can make some evangelicals shudder! Yet, it need not.

Again, we appeal to our understanding of Holy Scripture as divine revelation. God has chosen how to produce Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is God's message delivered in the manner God has deemed appropriate. Man can seek to understand *what* God has done and *why* he might have done it, but man should tread lightly if man is going to insist on *how* God must have achieved his goal.

There are two distinct ideas that must be delineated from the JEDP theory of Wellhausen and others. The first is the idea of editing various sources to make a whole. The second is the process itself, both when and where sources were allegedly combined.

As to editing, there is nothing inconsistent with the claims of Scripture or the view of inspiration if we consider various scrolls (books) of the Old Testament as composites generated from other sources. Consider the idea of Mosaic authorship of Genesis. If Moses fully wrote the book of Genesis, surely we do not believe he did so having experienced first hand the creation, the flood, Babel, or even Father Abraham! Moses certainly got that information from other sources. Now maybe those stories came from divine revelation on Sinai, or maybe they came from other stories. Either way, they are not first hand accounts. They are assimilations by a prophet under the hand of God.

Similarly, if a prophet under the hand of God were to make such an assimilation of materials at the time of Ezra, for example, that does not invalidate the truth of the Scripture.

Dating.

Aside from editing, there is the second and separate issue of *when* and *where*. This is where the theory, and others like it, frequently accumulate baggage that does not square with the views of Scripture foundational to this lesson and approach.

Many scholars have followed Wellhausen's lead and argue that every source document was written much later than Moses. This would invalidate Scripture's

claims that Moses was an author of principal parts of the Pentateuch.²⁴ The arguments for dating materials much later than Moses vary. Some are based on vocabulary, some on place names, some on the idea that the issues addressed seem more prevalent later in Israeli history, and some on whether Moses even existed.

We do not accept these as valid reasons to conclude the late dating of all the Pentateuch. Many of these will be considered in more details in later lessons, but a few are appropriately discussed here.

As we look at the vocabulary and spelling of the Hebrew in the Pentateuch, some scholars point out some words that seem to have later forms and spellings than would be around before 1,000 BC. For example, David Noel Freedman, a thorough Hebrew scholar, has explained that the Hebrew spelling in the Pentateuch and throughout the Hebrew Bible reflects the spelling and writing of the period around the time of script change (mid-fifth century BC).²⁵ This is like seeing “you” where you expect a “thou” in a Shakespeare copy. It is reasonable to assume, however, that since Moses was not necessarily writing in the later Hebrew we are reading, that whoever transcribed/translated his writings for the people would have done so with more modern language. We certainly see a similar thing in our modern translations of Scripture.

This reading of Scripture does not invalidate early authorship. Rather, it recognizes that as the script changed, the spelling likely changed as well. If the work was being done at the time of prophets like Ezra, whom we recognize as working under the hand of God, then later spelling should not jettison the idea that Moses had authorship of portions of the original documents.

The same observation is true as archaeology finds that place names are used in places that might be a later name than would have been present at the time of Moses. We can expect a later scribe to use the name in use at the time of his copying into the current script.

The distinction that must be drawn is between date of composition and date of assimilation or transcription/transliteration and adaptation to another script and time. Once that distinction is realized, there are no real issues to recognizing Scripture as God’s revelation accurate both in *what* he says and *how* he says it!

²⁴ Some Old Testament scholars invalidate Mosaic authorship believing that Moses was a fictional character. Of course, we do not subscribe to the belief that Moses is a fictional character, but that will be addressed in later lessons.

²⁵ See Freedman’s preface to Andersen and Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Institute Press 1986) at x-xi.

Structure.

One last factor to be considered in the authorship of Genesis is the structure. The structure of Genesis lends a careful scholar to see that it is written as a coherent whole built around a special Hebrew noun: *tol'dot*. This word means “offspring” or “descendants.” It is used eleven times in Genesis: 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; and 37:2. It is typically translated as, “These are the generations of...”

The author of Genesis used this same phrasing repeatedly to discuss the stories and genealogies that make up the book. It shows a consistent structure that brings greater understanding into the directed nature of the text. Genesis is not some haphazard assimilation of different matters. It is a carefully crafted book that follows a planned scheme of presentation.

This will be detailed more in coming lessons and is subject to the “Want more?” section at the end of this lesson.

4. A co-opting of local legends.

Another factor to consider in the sourcing of the Pentateuch are other stories prevalent in the Canaanite area where the Jews settled after release from Egyptian bondage. There were many local legends and myths, but the two that seem to get the most press are the *Epic of Gilgamesh* stories, the *Atrahasis* and the *Enuma Elish*. Since the discoveries of these myths, scholars and laymen alike have questioned whether the Old Testament is simply a Hebrew re-working of these pagan stories. The Epic of Gilgamesh is most famous for its flood account and it will be dealt with in the lesson on Noah.

Atrahasis

The *Atrahasis* story is one of history’s oldest written stories. It concerns the people and gods of Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern Iraq. The copies we have were written in Akkadian, a Semitic language that was originally written in wedge shaped cuneiform writing on clay tablets. Many of these tablets have been excavated and firmly dated to 2,000 BC. and earlier. Every decade, more work is done on ancient Akkadian and later translations offer better readings of these myths.²⁶

“*Atrahasis*” means “Extra-wise” and is featured in a number of stories, including flood accounts like that in Gilgamesh. Found on clay tablets that are dated around

²⁶ The version used for this lesson is the translation by Dalley, Stephanie, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford 2000).

1700 BC is a creation account within the story that is a good example for comparison to the Genesis creation story.

Atrahasis begins:

When the gods instead of man did the work, bore the loads, the gods' load was too great, the work too hard, the trouble too much.

With this start, the gods work toward dividing territory, dividing chores, and fighting over who did what. Ultimately, a decision is made to make humanity to do their work for them!

The role of mankind is planned:

Beletili the womb-goddess is present—Let her create primeval man so that he may bear the yoke... Let man bear the load of the gods!

With that, the reply is that clay and the blood of a god is needed for the creation. Then we read:

Then one god should be slaughtered... Nintu shall mix clay with his flesh and blood. Then a god and a man will be mixed together in clay.

They decide to slaughter Ilawela, known for his intelligence, and clay is mixed with his flesh and blood, some spit is added to the clay, and presto! Man is made to relieve the gods from their hard work. To be more precise, seven men and seven women are made. The story does not stop there, for the blood of the god made man immortal. In a matter of 1200 years, man became rather a problem for the chief god who decides to destroy mankind with a flood. That story saves for another day when we enjoy the *Epic of Gilgamesh*!

Enuma Elish

The *Enuma Elish* is more recent than the *Atrahasis*. Some scholars see it as a deliberate attempt to replace the older story with a new account of other gods.²⁷ It begins with the cosmic god Apsu mingling with the cosmic goddess Tiamet, producing many noisy young gods and goddesses. We must note that the god Apsu was “fresh water” (“waters of the earth”) and the goddess Tiamet was “salt water” (“Waters of the sea”). The noisy young deities got on Dad’s (Apsu’s) nerves, so he decided to kill them, much to mom’s chagrin.

²⁷ Sparks, Kenton, *Ancient Texts for the study of the Hebrew Bible: a Guide to Background Literature* (Hendrickson 2005) at 314-5.

Before Dad could commit his deicide (“mass killing of deities”), Ea, the god of wisdom, cast a spell and killed Dad! Ea then has a new baby deity with his wife naming him Marduk, who becomes the patron saint of Babylon.²⁸

Meanwhile, original Mom (Tiamet) is angry over the killing of her husband. She seeks revenge with her demons of chaos, but is thwarted by Marduk who defeats chaos by blowing excess wind into Tiamet’s mouth and then shooting an arrow into her stomach. Marduk then cuts Tiamet in half and used half to make the heavens and half to make the earth.

Then, attention is turned to making humans, again to relieve the gods of their hard work. A slain demon god’s blood is used to animate man.

Biblical Comparison

As outlandish as these stories seem in comparison to the Genesis creation account, some scholars have sought to draw parallels and suggest that the Hebrew account was a co-option of these or similar stories. There are suggestions that the Genesis story features God conquering chaos, that the waters play a role in Genesis as well as *Enuma Elish*, and that creation leads to a flood from the hands of the divine. Some have even suggested that Hebrew words are corrupted forms of “Tiamet” and other deities in the Mesopotamian myths.²⁹

An examination of these stories provides major distinctions that could not have gone unnoticed to the Hebrews who had the Biblical account. Consider that the other myths were prevalent in culture. They were the major thoughts and beliefs of many outside the Hebrew faithful. In contrast to those accounts of multiple gods, tired and overworked, arguing and dissatisfied, plotting and scheming, who need godly blood to bring new life, and who are able to be fooled with magic and even able to die, comes the God of Genesis.

Genesis gives a God who creates, not out of fatigue and need for relief, but out of a desire to love and give to man. Creating and working is not toil to God, for he creates with a word. Then when God is done, he can rest for he finishes himself

²⁸ This gives some scholars insight into a reason for this new myth. As new rulers took over, they often would try to give some cosmic reason for their new and greater power (as compared to their predecessors). Frequently, this would include an explanation of how their personal god(s) has taken over from the god(s) of the previous ruler.

²⁹ This lesson is not the place to discuss the finer points of linguistic analysis on “*tiamet*” and the Hebrew “*tehom*” (“formless”). For any so inclined, there is a wonderfully thorough linguistic investigation that dispels these theories. See Tsumura, David, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: a Linguistic Investigation* (Sheffield Academic Press (JSOT) 1989).

what he wanted to do. God makes man, and rather than being fed up with him or finding him a nuisance, God wants man to be fruitful and multiply. God does not need blood to make man; he simply breathes life into him. God is not one of many; he is simply One. God is not confused with elements be they seawater or fresh water; God created everything.

Could Moses, or another prophet under the hand of God, have taken local myths and reshaped them to fit God's truth? That question will get explored further in the lesson on Creation and evolution. For now, we should note that the Biblical account of creation is not simply a re-working of local legends. It is a distinct story with a distinct message set far apart from those of local tribes or nations.

CONCLUSION

We started this lesson with questions of authorship and credibility. We end it with affirmations, not because we can conclusively assert that Moses wrote each and every word of the Pentateuch exactly how we now read them. The reason is that the ultimate source of Scripture is God. This lesson may seem complicated. Several books worth of material is condensed into this lesson, but the overall point is simple.

God has worked through history and through many people to place his Holy Scriptures before people. We have Moses, Ezra, and many others writing and assimilating under the hand of God. We may not know exactly who wrote each passage, nor what each independent source is, nor even who put the total projects together. But, we do know through the recognition of Hebrew authority, the authority of Christ and the apostles, and the authority of the church, that we have Holy Scripture. With Scripture, we have revelation of God. Without it, we are lost with manmade ideas that bear little to no sense to truth.

As we read the Bible, we can read it with confidence that it is God's revelation to man. As such, it communicates what God wishes in the manner he chooses.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"And the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words..." (Ex. 34:27).*

God made man. He made man in his image. But God did not stop there. Even after man is removed from the Garden, God continues to communicate to man. God set up prophets and had those prophets write as per God's instructions. These were words that God has provided as a God who communicates. We may not know exactly all the words Moses wrote, but we know that the entirety of Scripture are words that God instructed to

have written for the benefit of humanity – including you and me. Let us commit to study anew what God has instructed written for our growth.

2. “*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers*” (Dt. 18:18).

Moses knew as he wrote what he heard from the LORD that his words were not the final words of God to man. Moses wrote of one who would follow him, a prophet from among the Hebrew descendants. That ultimate prophet was Jesus. Jesus – the Word of God, flesh, dwelling among us (Jn 1:14). In Moses we have the law, but in Christ we have God’s grace and truth (Jn 1:17). As we continue our study of Moses and the Old Testament, let us do so with an eye toward its fulfillment in Christ. For as the New Testament book of Hebrews begins: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”

3. “*In the beginning, God created...*” (Gen. 1:1).

God stands over creation. He is not a part of it. Its laws do not control him. He is not subject to the labor of working the earth. He is not in competition with other gods. God is all-powerful, loving, and compassionate. He has made us in his image and seeks relationship with us. This is not out of his need for us. It is out of his giving love. Let us commit to learning of God, of his work, and how we should serve and relate to him each day of our lives.

WANT MORE?

As we mentioned earlier, *toledot* is a Hebrew word that in various phrasing is translated something along the lines of, “these are the generations of...” It is found in eleven places in Genesis and each time sets material that follows as detailed information or an offspring of someone or thing that has already been introduced.

For example, in Genesis 2:4, we have the generations of heaven and earth; in 5:1 – the generations of Adam; in 6:9 – the generations of Noah; in 10:1 – the generations of Noah’s sons; in 11:10 – the generations of Shem; in 11:27 – the generations of Terah; in 25:12 – the generations of Ishmael; in 25:19 – the generations of Isaac; in 36:1 – the generations of Esau (again in 36:9); and in 37:2 – the generations of Jacob.

A number of scholars have contended that Genesis contains two separate accounts of creation, one in 1:1-2:3 and a second in 2:4-3:24. In what ways could the *tol’dot* phrasing indicate that the stories are not two, but are one in purpose?

APPENDIX

Famed archaeologist and Semitic linguist W. F. Albright prepared a chart of Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions with related alphabet information. We reproduce that below:

Phen. Value	Schematic Forms	Early North-west Semitic	Early South Semitic	Early Letter Names	Meaning of Names
ʾ		𐤀 (14th) 𐤁 (13th)	𐤁 𐤂 (Jamme)	ʾalp-	ox-head
b		𐤂 (17th) 𐤃 (13th)	𐤃	bêt-	house
g		𐤄 (15th) 𐤅 (12th)	𐤄 𐤅	gaml-	throw-stick
d		𐤆 𐤇 (10th)	𐤆 (Jamme)	digg-	fish
ḏ		?	𐤈 𐤉 (Jamme)	?	?
h		𐤊 (10th)	𐤊	hô(?)	man calling
w		𐤋 (10th)	𐤌 (ʾ used for y)	wô(waw)	mace
z	?	𐤍 (14th) 𐤎 (10th)	𐤍	zê(n-)	?
h		𐤏 (12th) 𐤐 (10th)	𐤏	hê(t-)	fence(?)
b		?	𐤑 (Jamme)	ḥa()	hank of yarn
t	?	𐤒 (16th) 𐤓 (10th)	𐤒	tê(t-)	spindle?
y		𐤔 (13th) 𐤕 (10th)	𐤕 (orig w)	yad-	arm
k		𐤖 (17th) 𐤗 (13th)	𐤖 𐤗	kapp-	palm
l		𐤘 (14th) 𐤙 (13th)	𐤘 𐤙 (Jamme)	lamd-	ox-goad
m		𐤚 (15th) 𐤛 (13th)	𐤚 (9th) 𐤛 (8th)	mêm-	water
n		𐤜 (14th) 𐤝 (12th)	𐤜 𐤝 𐤞	nahš-	snake
š	?	𐤟 (10th)	𐤟 𐤠	(šamk-?)	?
e		𐤡 (12th) 𐤢 (10th)	𐤡	ʿên-	eye
g		𐤣 (15th)	𐤣 𐤤 (Jamme)	gâ()	?
p		𐤥 (10th)	𐤥 𐤦	pu't-(?)	corner?
s/z		𐤧 (10th)	𐤧 𐤨	ša(d-)	plant
ḏ	?	?	𐤩	?	?
q		𐤪 (14th) 𐤫 (10th)	𐤪 𐤫 (Jamme)	qu(p-)	?
r		𐤬 (16th-14th)	𐤬 𐤭	na'š-	head of man
š/t		𐤮 (13th) 𐤯 (10th)	𐤮 𐤯	tann-	composite bow
š		?	𐤰 𐤱 (Jamme)	?	?
t		𐤲 𐤳 (13th)	𐤲 𐤳 (Jamme)	tô(taw)	owner's mark