

# DID MOSES WRITE THE PENTATEUCH?

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The term *pentateuch* is derived from the Greek *πεντάτευχος* which refers to a five volume book. The Jews call these five books the *Torah*, which means “instruction” or “law.” This is why in the New Testament the first five books are often referred to as the “law.”

The names of the books come from the *Septuagint* (a Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from the third century BC) via the *Vulgate* (the Latin translation of the Bible made by Jerome in the fourth century AD).

Genesis—“origin”  
Exodus—“journey out”  
Leviticus—“having to do with the Levites”  
Numbers—i.e. of the census  
Deuteronomy—“the second law”

Genesis and Deuteronomy are clearly independent books. Genesis tells the story of the creation of the world and God’s dealings with his people up to the time of Joseph and the descent into Egypt. Deuteronomy is essentially Moses’ last speech to the sons of Israel before his death. The end of Deuteronomy records Joshua’s succession to Moses and the circumstances of Moses’ death.

In contrast, the books Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers form a cycle of books that are clearly intended to be one unified work. These books tell the story of Israel from the time of the oppression in Egypt until the arrival in the plains of Moab before the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land. The break between Genesis and Exodus is clearly marked by 1) the change in structure (Genesis is structured by *toledoth* formulae), and 2) a distinction in time (Exodus passes over the first generations in Egypt very casually).

## AUTHORSHIP

From early times, even before the New Testament, Jews commonly accepted that the first five books of the Bible were written by Moses (see *Sirachus*; Philo, *Vit. Cont.* 25; *Abrah.* 1; Josephus, *Ap.* 1.37ff). This tradition was also accepted by the Early Church, although various heretics argued that there were *interpolations* in the Pentateuch. These were passages that did not fit with their own preconceived theological ideas.

In the time of the protestant Reformation it was generally thought that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible, although it was also recognised that there were small additions here and there. It was said that later scribes had brought the text up to date (see, for example, Gen. 14:7 which mentions the “country of the Amalekites,” cf. Gen. 36:12, 16; and compare Gen. 14:14 “Dan” with Jud. 18:29) and that explanations had been inserted (see, e.g., Exod. 16:36; 30:13; Lev. 27:25; Num. 3:47; Deut. 2:10-12; 3:11, 14).

## Liberal Theories—JEDP

### Astruc (b.1684)

Astruc was a Roman Catholic Jew who in 1753 published a book defending the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and, thereby, its authority. Astruc believed that the different names of God used in Genesis pointed to four different documents and that Moses originally arranged these four documents in four columns in chronological order. Later copyists failed to recognise the four columns and presented the book of Genesis as if it was a unified story.

**Column 1:** passages with the name *Elohim*  
**Column 2:** passages with the name *Yahweh*  
**Column 3:** passages which seem to repeat the “same” story a third time

#### Column 4: passages where the name of God does not occur

This was the beginning of a line of thinking which many liberal scholars would develop into what is now known as the Documentary Hypothesis. The names of three nineteenth century scholars are particularly associated with this theory, Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen. They believed that the Pentateuch was a late compilation of various documents arising from different schools in different phases of Israel's "religious development." They were strongly influenced by an evolutionary idea of religious development, from primitive religion through to legalistic religion. There was a heavy debt to the philosophy of Hegel which was then in vogue.

#### Kuenen

Kuenen's theory may be diagrammed as follows:

JE—made up of:

J—a document arising in North Israel c.800 BC

E—a document arising in North Israel c.750 BC

The combination JE was a Judean redaction from c.600 BC

D—this contained Deut.12-26, 28 and was the book "found" by Josiah (see 2 Kings 22)

JE+D—were combined during the time of the exile

P—a document of priestly laws edited in or after the exile

Finally, after the exile, the Hexateuch (i.e. the six books from Genesis to Joshua) was put together in the "school of Ezra."

#### Wellhausen

Wellhausen adopted this scheme in the main, working it up into his ideas on the evolutionary development of Israel's religion. He saw JE reflecting a primitive nomadic religion where God is worshipped on many altars by means of simple offerings. This developed into agricultural religion where agricultural festivals were taken over from the Canaanites. Later festivals were added to celebrate historical events. Such historicising festivals (e.g. Passover) later became central. In Wellhausen's view, religion then developed into prophetic religion which reacted against sacrifices, although sacrifices were finally also incorporated into the latest stage of Israel's development, namely, that of legalistic religion.

A brief characterisation of the supposed documents is as follows:

#### J = Jahwist

Begins at Genesis 2:4b. The Jahwist is a story-teller who is not afraid to speak of God in anthropomorphic (i.e. human) terms.

#### E = Elohist

Begins with the history of the patriarchs (either in Gen. 15 or 20). Some authors think that the Elohist also told stories from before the time of the patriarchs. In any event he reports the calling of Abraham. He presents the idea that the name Yahweh was first revealed at Exodus 3 (to Moses, see appendix). For "E" (unlike "J") there is a certain distance between God and man who does not deal with man directly but, for example, through angels and dreams. [Compare, however, Gen. 15:1 where *Yahweh* reveals himself in a dream!] E tries to defend the actions of the patriarchs (e.g. Abraham's lie, Gen. 20:12). J just tells it like it is (Gen. 12:10ff; 16:6). E uses the name "Horeb" for the mountain of God (J uses "Sinai"). E speaks of "Amorites" instead of J's "Canaanites."

#### D = Deuteronomist

This is essentially the major part of the book of Deuteronomy, which according to liberal theory was forged in the time of Josiah in order to effect his reform of Israel's religion. The main aspect of this reform is the "new" requirement that there be only *one* legitimate sanctuary in which God may be worshipped (i.e., the temple in Jerusalem). These scholars suppose that before Josiah, the high places were perfectly legitimate, but that Josiah's men fabricated Deuteronomy under the name of Moses in order to change things.

## **P = Priestly codex**

The priestly codex supposedly begins with Genesis 1 and contains mostly laws concerning the cultus and priesthood, although it also contains some stories. Interest in the cultus is evident in the creation (sabbath), Genesis 9:1-17; 17:1ff. The name Yahweh is used for God only after the meeting between God and Moses (Exod. 6). No sacrifices are mentioned until the time of Moses who instituted the legitimate sacrificial system. "P" is interested in genealogies. His style is dry and lacks the vital story-telling abilities of "J" and "E."

## **Documents or Complexes of Oral Tradition?**

Early in the twentieth century it seemed like the documentary theory had reached a dead end. No two scholars could completely agree about which texts belonged with which document. Individual Bible verses were often splintered into tiny fragments and the reasoning had become very tortured and forced. The German scholar *Gunkel* tried to break the deadlock by arguing that J and E are not *documents* but two distinct stories which are both the result of a long process of oral tradition. Gunkel envisaged tribal elders sitting around the campfire telling and retelling the stories of the patriarchs. In this he was influenced by contemporary scholarly interest in the non-literary tribal cultures of Africa which had recently been colonised. At this time many scholars saw in the African tribes a picture of what the ancient near East must have been like (this was before the discovery of many significant documents in the ancient near East which later showed the fallacy of such a parallel). According to Gunkel these oral traditions (with their embellishments) were only later committed to writing.

## **Comments**

Many scholars these days have abandoned this theory of several different documents although it is still fairly widely used by liberals. Scepticism has arisen due to the fact that *no two scholars* can agree as to exactly which passages are supposed to belong to which documents. The division of the documents according to the use of various divine names has proven to be untenable. In order to make such a division work, many texts need to be changed (i.e. "conjecturally emended").

The use of the names of God to divide the documents stems ultimately from a particular interpretation of Exodus 3:13ff and 6:2ff. These passages are read as if they were saying that God revealed the name *Yahweh* for the first time to Moses. *If this were so it would be very strange that the so-called late redactor of the Pentateuch allowed this name Yahweh to stand in many passages in Genesis.* This use cannot be explained as proleptic (as if the narrator is using the name which God himself used in later times) for in Genesis 15:2, 7; 28:13 God reveals himself to the patriarchs as Yahweh, and Abraham even calls God by this name. In other respects Genesis is very cautious and consequent in the use of names (after Gen. 17, not Abram but Abraham, not Sarai but Sarah). Can it really be seriously supposed that when the Pentateuch was composed the person responsible allowed Exodus 3 and 6 to stand in the text if he thought that they were in complete contradiction to what Genesis reveals? See the appendix for a discussion of the meaning of these texts.

The liberal scholars also use so-called stylistic criteria to attempt to determine which Bible passages belong to which "documents." But style is not only a difficult criterion in and of itself, i.e., difficult to describe, an author's style can also change during the course of his life. Different styles may be used by the same author in different contexts and for different subjects. Furthermore, many scholars argue that "J" and "E" etc. are actually composed of complex layers of material or that they are compilations by later editors. If this is so then the criterion of style can no longer reliably be applied. When is the style that of the editor, and when is it that of his source?



Around the beginning of this century archaeological finds definitively destroyed the ideas of Wellhausen on the development of Israel's religion. Wellhausen had supposed that it was unthinkable that there could have been written laws around the time of Moses. Written documents were in his opinion very late. But in 1901-2 the Hammurapi law code was found which dates from 1728-1686 BC. This spelt the death knell to the theory of the evolution of law codes. It precedes Moses by 300 years! Since then other law codes have been found, one possibly dating to 2050 BC (a Sumerian law code). There was and is therefore no good reason to set aside the biblical evidence that the Law of God was written down (cf. e.g. Josh.1:7-8; 8:31-34; 1Ki.2:3; 2Ki.14:6; 2Chron.23:18; Ezra 7:6; Neh.8:2,15; 10:29; 13:1ff).

Despite all this, many liberal scholars still try to hang on to some kind of documentary hypothesis. They have been forced to abandon Wellhausen's evolutionary approach to the religion of Israel and must now also concede that there are at least many Mosaic elements in the Pentateuch. In the final analysis the question is one of *faith*. Do we approach the biblical record with faith that we are reading the inspired Word of God, the creator of heaven and earth? Or do we approach it in unbelief? The unbeliever has, of course, a vested interest in showing that the Bible cannot possibly be what it says that it is, for if he is wrong—the consequences are deadly, eternally deadly!

### **How much of the Pentateuch did Moses write?**

It is obvious that many parts of the Pentateuch were written by Moses himself under the direct guidance of God.

Exod. 17:14 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."*

Exod. 24:4 *And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.* (refers to Exod.20:19-23:33)

Exod. 34:27 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."* (refers to Exod. 34:11-26)

Num 33:2 *And Moses recorded their starting places according to their journeys by the command of the LORD, and these are their journeys according to their starting places.*

Deut. 31:9 *So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. ... v.24 And it came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete,* (refers to the book of Deuteronomy)

Deut. 31:19 *"Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, in order that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. v.22 So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel.* (refers to the song of Deut. 32)

Outside of the Pentateuch there are also references to Moses' authorship of many of the laws in the Old Testament:

2Chron. 8:13 *... and did so according to the daily rule, offering them up according to the commandment of Moses, for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths.* (refers at least to Num. 28)

2Chron. 23:18 *Moreover, Jehoiada placed the offices of the house of the LORD under the authority of the Levitical priests, whom David had assigned over the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses—with rejoicing and singing according to the order of David.* (cf. Lev. 1; Exod. 29:38ff; Lev. 6:1ff; Num. 28:3ff)

2Chron. 25:4 *However, he did not put their children to death, but did as it is written in the law in*

*the book of Moses, which the LORD commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, nor sons be put to death for fathers, but each shall be put to death for his own sin." (refers to Deut. 24:16)*

The following references are more general ...

*2Chron. 34:14 When they were bringing out the money which had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the LORD given by Moses.*

*Ezra 3:2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. (is this a reference to Lev. 1?)*

*Ezra 7:6 This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.*

*Neh. 8 (public reading and explanation of law of Moses, refers to the Feast of Booths = Lev.23)*

*Neh. 10:28-39 (various laws, Deut. 7:3; 15:9; Lev. 25:4; Num. 18 and Deut. 14)*

*Neh. 13:1-3 On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. So it came about, that when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel. (refers to Deut. 23:3-4)*

*Dan 9:11 Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. ... v.13 As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Thy truth. (refers to Deut. 27-28)*

*Mal 4:4 Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.*

The New Testament also refers to Moses as author of laws:

*Mat 23:2 saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of **Moses**;*

*Joh 1:17 For the Law was given through **Moses**; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.*

*Joh 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom **Moses** in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

*Joh 7:19 "Did not **Moses** give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"*

*Act 13:39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of **Moses**.*

*2Co 3:15 But to this day whenever **Moses** is read, a veil lies over their heart;*

*Heb 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of **Moses** dies without mercy on the testimony of two*

*or three witnesses.*

Various specific laws are also mentioned:

Mat 8:4 (cf. Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14) *And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that **Moses** commanded, for a testimony to them."* (refers to Lev. 14:1-32)

Mat 19:7-8 (cf. Mk. 10:3-4) *They said to Him, "Why then did **Moses** command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, **Moses** permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. (refers to Deut. 24:1-4)*

Mat 22:24 (cf. Mk. 12:19; Lk. 20:28) *saying, "Teacher, **Moses** said, 'IF A MAN DIES, HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP AN OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER.'" (refers to Deut. 25:5)*

Mar 7:10 *For **Moses** said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH'; (refers to Exod. 21:17, cf. Deut. 5:16, and Lev. 20:9)*

Luk 2:22 *And when the days for their purification according to the law of **Moses** were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (refers to Lev. 12)*

Joh 8:5 *Now in the Law **Moses** commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say? (refers to Deut. 22:22)*

Act 3:22 ***Moses** said, 'THE LORD GOD SHALL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED in everything He says to you. (refers to Deut. 18:15)*

Act 7:37 *This is the **Moses** who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD SHALL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.'" (refers to Deut. 18:15)*

Act 7:44 *Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to **Moses** directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. (refers to Exod. 25:9)*

Rom 10:5 *For **Moses** writes concerning the righteousness which is based on law "the one who does them, that man shall live by them. (modified translation, the reference is to Lev. 18:3)*

Rom 10:19 *But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first **Moses** says, "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU." (refers to Deut. 32:21)*

1Cor. 9:9 *For it is written in the Law of **Moses**, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? (refers to Deut. 25:4)*

Moses' authorship may also be claimed for *historical* portions of the Pentateuch, although this is doubtful:

Mar 12:26 (cf. Lk. 20:37) *But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of **Moses**, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'?' (Exod. 3—"of Moses" may mean here "about Moses")*

Joh 7:22 *On this account **Moses** has given you circumcision (not because it is from **Moses**, but from*

*the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. (This may only mean that Moses reaffirmed the sign of circumcision as binding in the law—see the following ...)*

*Joh 7:23 If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath that the Law of **Moses** may not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?*

*Act 15:1 And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of **Moses**, you cannot be saved."*

*Act 15:5 But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of **Moses**."*

*Act 21:21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake **Moses**, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.*

Finally, “Moses” can be used as a generic term referring to the first five books of the Old Testament, in contrast to the rest of the Old Testament:

*Luk 16:29 But Abraham said, 'They have **Moses** and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ... v.31 But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to **Moses** and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'*

*Luk 24:27 And beginning with **Moses** and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

*Act 26:22 And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and **Moses** said was going to take place;*

*Act 28:23 And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of **Moses** and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.*

The rest of the Old Testament may also be divided up into the “prophets” and the “psalms”:

*Luk 24:44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of **Moses** and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."*

### **Conclusions on Moses’ authorship**

We may note in conclusion that the Bible is very clear that God revealed His laws to Moses who taught these to the people. This means that the laws contained in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy may be considered to be of Mosaic origin.

This does not necessarily mean that the Bible books of the Pentateuch as we have them in their present form were written by Moses. In fact, for a number of reasons, this seems rather unlikely.

1) The presence of many additional notations suggests at the very least the work of later scribes (from the schools of the prophets?) to update the text (see above). It may indicate that the Pentateuch as we have it was written later. Genesis 36:31 would certainly seem to point in this direction:

*Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel.*

This would seem to indicate that the book of Genesis in its present form dates at least from the period of the kings.<sup>1</sup>

2) Exodus 16:35 refers to the ceasing of manna which occurred after the crossing of the Jordan (cf. Josh. 5:12). Numbers 32:34-42 mentions cities built after the conquest. Exodus and Numbers (probably Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers as one unified product, see above) must, at the very earliest, date from the time after the conquest of Canaan. It is probably to be dated much later, see below.

3) The book of Deuteronomy, whilst it mostly just gives the text of Moses' speech on the plains of Moab, also includes a final chapter on Moses' death. Deuteronomy must, at the earliest, date to the time of the conquest of Canaan. We should, however, also note that Deuteronomy 31:24, 26 may suggest that Moses wrote down the text of Deuteronomy 1-30 (cf. Deut. 28:58, 61; 29:20-21, 27; 30:10), although some smaller portion may also be referred to. Deuteronomy is thus probably the oldest book of the Pentateuch.

4) The Pentateuch in its present form only gives us a *selection* of the laws which God gave to Moses. It is clear from other passages of Scripture that many more laws were given by God to Israel through Moses. The following texts refer to laws ascribed to Moses which are not found in the Pentateuch:

2 Chron. 30:16 *And they stood at their stations after their custom, according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled the blood which they received from the hand of the Levites.*

2 Chron. 35:12 *Then they removed the burnt offerings that they might give them to the sections of the fathers' households of the lay people to present to the LORD, as it is written in the book of Moses. They did this also with the bulls.*

Ezra 6:18 *Then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses. (This implies that David's divisions for the priests and Levites go back to Moses!)*

Neh. 10:32ff —annual contribution of a third of a shekel for the sanctuary and arrangements for the wood supply for burnt offerings and other arrangements for collection.

The editions of the law of Moses mentioned in these Old Testament passages must, therefore, have been *different* from the Pentateuch as we have it. This may imply that the compilation of Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers had not yet been made. If this is so, then the compilation of this *selection* of the laws of Moses (which incorporates the history of Israel from Egypt to the plains of Moab) may have been made in the time of the chronicler (i.e., after the exile). This may also explain why detailed laws on the Levitical and priestly duties in worship are not included in Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers, for the Chronicler had already provided these laws in his history of the kings. The regulations given in 1 and 2 Chronicles concerning the temple and its ritual are deliberately dovetailed with those given in Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers so that there is little or no overlap between the two. There is therefore no repetition in 1 Chronicles of sacrificial ritual.

Just as with many other Bible books in the Old Testament, we can no longer say exactly when they were written or give the names of the persons that wrote them. We confess that ...

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1 Abraham was born (according to biblical chronology) late in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century BC. That he came from Sumerian Ur is made very probable, not only from the existence of the city of that name in his time period, but also from the documentary parallels between Genesis and, for example, the Sumerian king list, creation story, flood story. Abraham probably spoke Akkadian (an ancient semitic language) and quite possibly Sumerian (a non semitic language). In any event, the documents used to compile the Hebrew edition of Genesis as we know it (presumably dating from the period of the kings) must have been *translated* into Hebrew. Here and there Aramaic words are used to indicate a different language, but this must be an attempt by the translator to give the reader a feel for the fact that a different language is involved. Aramaic was not spoken in the time period Genesis is describing. Which documents were used to compile Genesis and where they came from are not stated in the book itself. The parallels might suggest that Abraham took ancient texts with him, although the text of Genesis shows that there are also *considerable* differences to ancient Akkadian-Sumerian literature. We are groping in the dark of course. It is just as possible, for example, that Melchizedek passed on to Abraham copies of relevant documents. Given that Abraham came from an idolatrous city, perhaps the latter suggestion has more merit. Documents from that time would of course have been written in cuneiform script.



2 Tim. 3:16-17 *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

Those who put together the first five books of the Bible as we know them will, of course, have used many *written* documents. We know that Moses wrote down the laws and even some historical events. See, e.g.:

Exod. 17:14 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."*

Exod. 24:4, 7 *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.*

Num 33:1-2 *These are the journeys of the sons of Israel, by which they came out from the land of Egypt by their armies, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. And Moses recorded their starting places according to their journeys by the command of the LORD, and these are their journeys according to their starting places.*

Deut. 31:22 *So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel.*

Deut. 31:24 *And it came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, ... (ref. to Deut. 1–30? See above)*

Other written documents will also have been used, for example, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* (Num. 21:14).

Josephus (*Ap.* 1.29) records that the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament were of old entrusted to the care of the High Priests and the prophets in Israel.

## APPENDIX: The Problem of Exodus 6:2-3<sup>2</sup>

Exodus 6:2-3 has caused quite a stir. This passage has been one of the basic pillars which liberals have used for their hypotheses. In their view, in the early patriarchal period, the tribal name of God was *El Shaddai* (= God Almighty), but now Moses was about to reveal for the first time the name *Yahweh* as the God of Israel. If we find the name *Yahweh* before Exodus 6 then this must be the work of the so-called Yahwist (“J”). This explanation will, however, not do for it imposes a theory on Scripture that is foreign to it. So how do we explain the text?

One suggestion has been to translate this passage as a question, i.e. “Was I not known to them by my name *Yahweh*?” This is silly.

Did the patriarchs know the name *Yahweh*? This is evident, see Genesis 14:22<sup>3</sup>; 15:2, 7, 8; 16:2, 5, 11 etc.. But if the patriarchs knew the name *Yahweh*, how are we to understand Exodus 6? The patriarchs clearly understood the name *El Shaddai*. How did they know the meaning of this name? *El Shaddai* is the one who can do things, who is powerful when humans are powerless. Abram and Isaac were confronted with the problem of childlessness. *El Shaddai* was the one able to rename the patriarchs, Abram (Abraham), and Jacob (Israel). This God Almighty was able to promise children and land. Thus the revelation of the name *El Shaddai* was a name whose meaning was known to the patriarchs. What connotation does *Yahweh* have? This was not revealed until God spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3). There God makes a wordplay based on the name *Yahweh* when asked what his name is (Exod. 3:14). He declares that he is *I-am-who-I-am* (abbreviated to *I-am* in the same verse). The meaning of this becomes clear in God’s explanation in the following verse:

*Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.*

The name *Yahweh* indicates the God who is ever present from generation to generation of the people He has chosen, the people with whom He has graciously entered into a covenant relation. The name *Yahweh* therefore connotes the God who remains faithful to his covenant promises for all time. This connotation or *meaning* of the name *Yahweh* was not made known to the patriarchs.

J. A. Motyer (*The Revelation of the Divine Name* [Tyndale, 1959]) has translated Exodus 6:2-3 as follows:

I am *Yahweh*, I manifested myself to Abram and Isaac and to Jacob in the character of *El Shaddai*. But in the character expressed by my name *Yahweh* I did not make myself known to them.

Motyer refers to Genesis 22 where Abram got a glimpse of the implications of the name *Yahweh*, cf. v.14. This is the only place before Exodus 3 where the name *Yahweh* is elaborated upon.

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2 This discussion is adapted from Prof. C. Van Dam, Lecture Notes on Old Testament Canonics (Hamilton, Canada, 1990).

3 Actually the name “Yahweh” probably does not belong to this text. The LXX, Peshitta and Gen. Apocryphon all omit it which suggests that the name “Yahweh” in the mss of MT is a later addition.