



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The traditional answer:

Passages in the Pentateuch itself say:

Exodus 17:14 "*Then the Lord instructed Moses, 'Write this down as a permanent record...'*"

Exodus 24:4 "*Then Moses carefully wrote down all the Lord's instructions.*"

Exodus 34:27 "*And the Lord said to Moses, 'Write down all these instructions, for they represent the terms of my covenant with you and with Israel.'*"

Leviticus 1:1 "*The Lord called to Moses from the Tabernacle and said to him, 'Give the following instructions to the Israelites...'*"

Leviticus 6:8 "*Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Give Aaron and his sons the following instructions...'*"

Deuteronomy 31:9 "*So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests.*"

Deuteronomy 31:24-26 "*When Moses had finished writing down this entire body of law in a book...*"



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The traditional answer:

Passages elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures say:

Joshua 1:7-8 "...Obey all the laws Moses gave you."

Joshua 8:31-34 "He followed the instructions that Moses the Lord's servant had written in the Book of the Law..."

Joshua 22:5 "...obey all the commands and the laws that Moses gave to you."

2 Chronicles 34:14 "...Hilkiah the high priest...found the book of the Law of the Lord as it had been given through Moses."

WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The traditional answer:

Passages in the Gospels which show that Jesus and John the Baptizer believed Moses to be the author:

Matthew 19:7-8 "...why did Moses say a man could merely write an official letter of divorce and send her away?", they asked. Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted divorce...'"

Matthew 22:24 "Moses said, 'If a man dies without children...'"

Mark 7:10 "For instance, Moses gave you this law from God..."

Mark 12:24 "...haven't you ever read about this in the writings of Moses, in the story of the burning bush..."

Luke 24:44 "...I told you that everything written about me by Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true."

John 1:17 "For the law was given through Moses..."

John 5:46 "But if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me because he wrote about me. And since you don't believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

John 7:23 "...do it, so as not to break the law of Moses..."





WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The traditional answer:

Passages elsewhere in the Christian Scriptures say:

Acts 26:22 "*...I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen...*"

Romans 10:5 "*For Moses wrote...*"

The belief that Moses wrote the Pentateuch was held by most Christians, Jews and Muslims until the early 20th century – though all of these groups acknowledged that over time scribal errors led to some changes in the written text.

Today, the belief that *Moses was either given the text of the Torah from God in one session on Mt. Sinai or piece-by-piece over the 40 years of the Exodus and that Moses wrote down that text before he died* is held only by Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and Christians who believe in strict Biblical inerrancy (often called Fundamentalists).



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

As early as the 16th century one of Martin Luther's disciples, Dr. Andreas Karlstadt, who was the chancellor at the University of Wittenburg and chair of its department of Theology, noticed that the style of the account of the death of Moses matched the style of the preceding portions of Deuteronomy, suggesting that whoever wrote about the death of Moses also wrote larger portions of the Torah.

By the 17th century some commentators argued outright that Moses did not write most of the Pentateuch. For instance, in 1651 Thomas Hobbes in the book *Leviathan*, argued that the Pentateuch dated from after Mosaic times because of several highly anachronistic verses. Hobbes was joined by other skeptics in the 17th century, but these people found their works condemned and even banned.



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

Many portions of the Torah seem to imply more than one author. Doublets and triplets repeat stories with different points of view. Notable repetitions include:

- the creation-accounts in *Genesis*. The creation-story in Genesis first describes a somewhat evolutionary process, starting with the creation of the Earth, then the lower forms of life, then animals, and finally man and woman (created together). It then begins the story again, but this time with the creation of man first, then animals to ease man's loneliness, and when this fails, the creation of woman from the man's rib;
- in the flood story Noah takes his family into the ark twice;
- the stories of the covenant between God and Abraham;
- the naming of Isaac;
- the three strikingly similar narratives in Genesis about a wife confused for a sister;
- the two stories of the revelation to Jacob at Bet-El;
- three different versions of how the town of Be'ersheba got its name;



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The modern answer:

- the story of the flood in Genesis appears to claim that two of all kinds of animal went on the ark, but also that seven of certain kinds went on, and that the flood lasted a year, but also lasted only 40 days;
- the Ten Commandments appear in Exodus 20, but in a slightly different wording in Deut 5. A second, almost completely different set of Ten Commandments appears in Exodus 34;
- Moses' wife, though often identified as a Midianite (and hence Caucasian), appears in the tale of Snow-white Miriam as a "Cushite" (Ethiopian), and hence black;
- in some locations God appears friendly and capable of errors and regret, and walks the earth talking to humans, but in others God seems unmerciful and distant;
- a number of places or individuals have multiple names. Some passages give the name of the mountain that Moses climbed to receive the commandments as *Horeb*, others as *Sinai*, Moses' father-in-law has at least three names in the Hebrew original.



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

In 1753 a French physician and scholar named John Astruc anonymously published a book about Genesis that noted that the first chapter of Genesis uses only the word "Elohim" for God, while other sections use the word "Jehovah". The second and third chapters combine the title and the name, giving rise to a new conception of the Deity as *Jehovah Elohim* ("Lord-God", as commonly translated in many English Bibles today).

He speculated that Moses may have compiled the Genesis account from earlier documents, some perhaps dating back to Abraham, and may have combined these into a single account. So he began to explore the possibility of detecting and separating these documents and assigning them to their original sources. He did this, taking it as a truth that one can analyze scriptural documents in the same manner as secular ones, and assuming that the varying use of terms indicated different writers.

The letters E (for Elohim source) and J (for Jehovah source) were introduced.



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

In 1886 the German historian Julius Wellhausen published a book noting that the prophetic books of the Bible and other ancient sources made no mention of the contents of much of Leviticus until after the Babylonian exile. He argued that Leviticus must have been written later than the other books of the Torah, probably by Jewish priests. The letter "P", for priestly source, became associated with this view.

Wellhausen argued that the Bible provides historians with an important source, but that they cannot take it literally. He argued that a number of people wrote the "hexateuch" (the Torah and the book of Joshua) over a long period.



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The modern answer:

Specifically, Wellhausen narrowed the field to four distinct narratives, which he identified by the terms:

Jahwist

Elohist

Deuteronomist

Priestly

He also proposed a **Redactor**, who edited the four accounts into one text. (Some suggest the redactor as *Ezra* the scribe.)

Using earlier propositions, Wellhausen argued that each of these sources has its own vocabulary, its own approach and concerns, and that the passages originally belonging to each account can be distinguished by differences in style (especially, the name used for God, the grammar and word usage, the political assumptions implicit in the text, and the interests of the author).



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

The "J" source: In this source God's name always appears as YHWH, which scholars transliterate in modern times as *Yahweh* (German spelling: *Jahwe*; earlier translators in English used the transliteration *Jehovah*).

The "E" source: In this source God's name always comes in the form *Elohim* (Hebrew for "God", or "Power") until the revelation of God's name to Moses, after which God's name becomes YHWH.

The "D" or "Dtr" source: The source that wrote the book of Deuteronomy, as well as the books of Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings.

The "P" source: The priestly material. Uses *Elohim* and *El Shaddai* as names of God.



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

The Documentary Hypothesis (aka Graf-Wellhausen)

The hypothesis proposes that a redactor (referred to as R) composed the Torah by combining four earlier source texts (J, E, P and D), specifically:

J - the Yahwist. J describes a human-like God called Yahweh and has a special interest in Judah and in the priesthood of Aaron. J has an extremely eloquent style. J uses an earlier form of the Hebrew language than P. J seems to have been written prior to c. 950 BC

E - the Elohist. E describes a human-like God initially called El (which sometimes appears as Elohim according to the rules of Hebrew grammar), and called Yahweh subsequent to the incident of the burning bush. E focuses on biblical Israel and on the Shiloh priesthood. E has a moderately eloquent style. E uses an earlier form of the Hebrew language than P. E seems to have been written prior to c. 850 BC.



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

The Documentary Hypothesis

D - the Deuteronomist. D consists of most of Deuteronomy. D probably also wrote the Deuteronomistic history (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings). D has a particular interest in the Shiloh priesthood and in King Josiah. D uses a form of Hebrew similar to that of P, but in a different literary style. D seems to have been written prior to c. 650 BC and perhaps later.

P - the Priestly source. P describes a distant and unmerciful God, sometimes referred to as Elohim or as El Shaddai (the Almighty). P partly duplicates J and E, but alters details to suit P's opinion, and also consists of most of Leviticus. P has its main interest in an Aaronid priesthood and in King Hezekiah. P has a low level of literary style, and has an interest in lists and dates. P seems to have been written prior to c. 550 BC and perhaps later.



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

The Documentary Hypothesis

The hypothesis suggests that various collections of oral traditions took written form both in biblical Israel (producing E) and in Judah (producing J) shortly after their separation into two kingdoms (ca 930 BC).

Rival priesthoods allegedly wrote these collections: the priests of Shiloh (in Israel) wrote E; while the Aaronid priests (in Judah) wrote J.

The hypothesis then goes on to state that after the fall of Israel to the Assyrians (ca 720 BC), the refugees from Israel brought E to Judah, and in the interests of assimilating those refugees into the general population, an unknown scribe combined the text with J to produce JE. Scholars speculate, the writer of JE may have thought it necessary to retain as much as possible of both J and E, in order to avoid readers and listeners complaining about missing or different texts and thus causing divisions.



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

The Documentary Hypothesis

The hypothesis suggests that, because of the centralizing religious reform instituted by King Hezekiah (reigned ca 715 - 687 BC), the Aaronid priests created a text (P) which rewrote JE in a light favorable to them and to the changes they made to the religion. In addition to performing this change, they removed a few intolerable stories (such as that of the golden calf), and added a few stories. Within the text the author(s) also added a body of laws (constituting most of Leviticus) supported by the Aaronids.

A few generations later, scholars believe, the Shiloh priesthood wrote a law-code more favorable to themselves and conspired with King Josiah (reigned ca 640 - 609 BC) to have it "found" in the Temple so that he could base reforms on it (Hezekiah's descendants had previously undone Hezekiah's reforms).



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The modern answer:

The Documentary Hypothesis

A scribe connected to the Shiloh group subsequently created a text (Dtr1) describing the span of time intervening between Moses and Josiah's rule, embedding the law code at the start in the framework of Moses' dying words.

Dtr1 presented Josiah as a parallel to Moses, an ideal king whose reforms would save Judah. But Josiah died in battle with the Egyptian army (ca 609 BC). Subsequent kings undid his reforms, and shortly afterward Babylon destroyed Judah, burnt the Temple, and killed the royal family (ca 586 BC). The scribe who created Dtr1 made minor additions (Dtr2) to the text to reflect the additional history, and to iron out the flaws in their original presentation of Josiah and the permanence of Judah (by implying that the destruction came as a result of the undoing of Josiah's reforms).

The resulting text became known as D.



WHO WROTE THE TORAH?

The modern answer:

The Documentary Hypothesis

When Persia conquered Babylon (539 BC), the Persian king Cyrus II sent the exiled elite of Judah back to their homeland, empowering Ezra to dictate the religion. JE and P contained rival histories and rival religious views, and P and D contained rival law-codes.

The Jews had to keep both sets of texts in order to avoid alienating each group in order to unify the nation, and thus to avoid a power struggle or the setting up a nation within a nation. But they also had motivation to iron out the differences: so that people had certainty as to the law-code and to their history.

An editor or editors (the **Redactor**) joined the texts together, making only minor additions and changes, creating the Torah as we know it, and Ezra read it out. Anyone who disagreed had the Persian king to answer to, so it became official.



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The modern answer:

The Documentary Hypothesis

This theory is accepted by most Conservative and Reform Jewish scholars, most Catholic and Orthodox Christian scholars, and most mainline Protestant (Anglican/Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc.) scholars.

The documentary hypothesis still remains a “theory” and continues to evolve. There are also rival, though much less accepted, theories about the multiple authors of the Torah.