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Lesson Three Homework

From late antiquity and into the Middle Ages, Jewish and Christian interpretation regarding the authorship of the Pentateuch abounds. While most of these views affirm Mosaic authorship, some question the validity of this view. However, each operates from the same starting point: the books that contain the patriarchal history and the Law of Moses were written by Moses, himself.

According to Avot 1:1–2, Moses received the Torah from God on Mount Sinai then passed it on to Joshua. Joshua subsequently passed it to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the "Men of the Great Assembly." Josephus wrote in *Against Apion* that of the twenty-two books of Hebrew scripture, Moses wrote five, "comprising the laws and the traditional history from the birth of man down to the death of the lawgiver" (179). Baba Bathra stated that "Moses wrote his own book and the portion of Balaam and Job" (14b). These men clearly held Moses to be the author of at least part, if not all, of the Pentateuch.

Ibn Ezra offers a different perspective. Jean-Louis Ska[1] summarizes Ibn Ezra's observations and hesitations: "For example, he considered it strange that Moses would have said: 'At that time the Canaanites were in the land' (Gen 12:6); he should have said, 'the Canaanites are now in the land,' because they were still there when he traveled from Egypt with the people of Israel" (99). Other difficulties Ibn Ezra found were the words "to this day" in Genesis 22:14, the reference to *beyond* the Jordan in Deuteronomy 1:1, and the reference to Og in the past tense in Deuteronomy 3:11.

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[1] *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch.*

As noted last week, the Hebrew Bible seems to bear witness to the fact of Moses's authorship of the Pentateuch. Avot, Josephus, and Baba Bathra seem to hold this view, while Ibn Ezra clearly does not. I look forward to learning more on this topic in the coming weeks.