

The Authorship of Deuteronomy 34: Moses or a Redactor?

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Introduction

When I announced one year ago that I had chosen the authorship of Deuteronomy 34 as the topic for my 2001 National ETS paper, one concerned soul asked, "Why choose a subject that no one will be interested in? Non-Mosaic authorship is irrefutable." Since that time, three articles have been published on Deuteronomy in *JBL*,¹ *Biblische Zeitschrift*,² and *JETS*.³ In *JBL* and *JETS* the article was even the lead article for those issues. Although the last was a study of more than Deuteronomy 34, the first two articles were focused on that chapter. It looks as though, as usual, I am just behind the crest of the wave. It is encouraging, however, to have independent confirmation that interest in Deuteronomy 34 is not passé.⁴

How does this topic fit into the theme of this year's theme ("Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries")? It is my contention that Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch should be preserved as one of the boundary markers of evangelicalism. Deuteronomy 34 is the one portion of the Pentateuch that appears to have the strongest argument against Mosaic authorship. As Herbert Wolf declared,

Any objective treatment of the authorship of the Pentateuch must take into account those statements that call into question the likelihood that Moses wrote them. The most obvious problem of course is the description of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34:1-12. Even the rabbis taught that these verses were added by Joshua to complete the law, and conservative scholars have generally agreed with this conclusion.⁵

¹ Thomas C. Römer and Marc Z. Brettler, "Deuteronomy 34 and the Case for a Persian Hexateuch," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119/3 (Fall 2000): 401-19.

² Christian Frevel, "Ein vielsagender Abschied: Exegetische Blicke auf den Tod des Mose in Dtn 34,1-12," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 45/2 (2001): 209-34.

³ Daniel I. Block, "Recovering the Voice of Moses: The Genesis of Deuteronomy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44/3 (Sept 2001): 385-408.

⁴ There are a number of articles and essays dealing with Deuteronomy 34 throughout the past decade. The following are but a brief sampling: Philipp Stoellger, "Deuteronomium 34 ohne Priesterschrift," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 105/1 (1993): 26-51; Félix García López, "Deut 34, Dtr History and the Pentateuch," in *Studies in Deuteronomy in Honour of C. J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. by F. García Martínez, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 47-61; Jeffrey H. Tigay, "The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. by Michael V. Fox, et al. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 137-43; and Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy*, Biblical Interpretation Series, 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), esp. 183-98 ("Before His Death" (Deut 32:48-34:12)).

⁵ Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1991), 58-59. The rabbinic reference to which he referred is *Baba Bathra* 14b.

Concluding his brief treatment of problematic portions of the Pentateuch, Wolf indicated that the “possible post-Mosaic materials in the Pentateuch are relatively minor. The bulk of the five books could indeed have been written by Moses or under his supervision.”⁶ Where should the boundary of evangelicalism be drawn? Mosaic authorship for “the bulk of” the Pentateuch or Mosaic authorship for all of the Pentateuch? Is the boundary drawn in such a way that the latter has been excluded or made to appear unscholarly and radical?

Acceptance of non-Mosaic authorship of all or part of Deuteronomy 34 is not new. Jerome remarked that the phrase “to this day” (v. 6) refers to “the time of composition of the history, whether you prefer the view that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch or that Ezra re-edited it. In either case I make no objection.”⁷ That indicates that around A.D. 383 the same two basic views were extant: (1) that Moses wrote all of the Pentateuch and (2) that someone other than Moses, at minimum, edited the writings of Moses, adding such observations as the events following Moses’ death. In the words of G. Herbert Livingston,

Since the Middle Ages, and especially during the first part of the twentieth century A.D., portions of the following verses were the center of argument—whether or not they were late additions and whether or not they denied Mosaic authorship. These verses are: Genesis 12:6b; 13:7b; 13:18; 14:14; 22:14; 23:19b; 36:31; 49:5-7; Exodus 6:26, 27; 16:33-35, 36; Numbers 4:3; 12:3; 13:16; 21:14; 24:7; *Deuteronomy* 1:1; 2:4-7; 2:26-30; 3:14-17; 10:6, 7; 32:7-12, 13-20; 34. *Their relationship to Mosaic authorship has properly faded out of discussion.*⁸

In case anyone should think that adherence to Mosaic authorship for all of Deuteronomy (much less the Pentateuch) is still considered a viable option among scholarly evangelicals, consider the words of J. A. Thompson nearly thirty years ago:

Probably no-one today would argue that Deuteronomy was entirely the work of Moses, although writers in former centuries attempted to show that Moses could have written of his own death by divine inspiration.⁹

As recently as September 2001 Block’s article in *JETS* expressed a similar conclusion: in pre-critical Jewish and Christian traditions the predominant interpretation ascribed the authorship of the Pentateuch as a whole and of Deuteronomy in particular to Moses. In fact, many maintained that the entire Torah was dictated by God to Moses, and this remains the position held by many preachers in evangelical churches, not to mention the lay people in the pews—though some would concede that a later writer (perhaps Joshua) may have added Deuteronomy 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷ “The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary: Against Helvidius,” *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, trans. by W. H. Fremantle, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, vol. 6, ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), 337.

⁸ G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch In Its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1974), 220 (emphasis added).

⁹ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 49.

While many evangelical scholars today argue for at least a more nuanced understanding of the book's origins, virtually all critical scholars reject this interpretation.¹⁰

Someone might well ask, "If this is the generally accepted view of the vast majority of evangelicals, what's the issue?" In response, I would suggest that the evidence for Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy 34 has been neglected and even mishandled and abused. In the process, "scholars who operate by a more conservative hermeneutic and try to let ancient documents speak for themselves are regularly marginalized."¹¹ I would invite us all to take another look at that evidence. After all, the foundational principle of evangelical biblical scholarship is (or, ought to be) φιλαλήθεια (*love of truth*). If the pursuit of truth leads to overwhelming evidence that Moses could not have authored Deuteronomy 34, the position of OT scholars like Wolf would appear to be confirmed. If, however, there is substantial evidence pointing to Mosaic authorship, a revival of the debate would be justified. For too long evangelical scholarship has treated Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch as if it were delusional and unworthy of consideration.

Procedure

Rather than organizing this paper topically (focusing on subjects of dispute within Deuteronomy 34), it will be presented textually (focusing on the text itself). Logical block diagrams will first be presented so that the structure and flow of the Hebrew text can be observed firsthand. Then a translation¹² of each section will initiate the examination of that block of text. The translation will be followed by a repetition of the logical block diagram with footnotes providing a detailed comparison of vocabulary, phraseology, and grammar with identical or similar vocabulary, phraseology, and grammar elsewhere in the Pentateuch. Lastly, pertinent discussion will conclude the treatment of each section of the text.

A detailed examination of the internal evidence of Deuteronomy 34 reveals that the vast majority of it was certainly within Moses' linguistic and compositional capability. It is not just the vocabulary, grammar, and phraseology, however, that Moses had the capacity to produce—the knowledge content is the real issue. After all, it could be argued (as Driver did long ago) that "the phraseology displays so little that is characteristic that it might have been used by any narrator."¹³

¹⁰ Block, "Recovering the Voice of Moses," 387. By contrasting the views in the pulpit and pew with the view in academia, Block has touched upon a significant aspect of the debate. Is the division a matter of unschooled preachers or unsound scholars? Block's reference to the view that God "dictated" the Torah needs clarification. The facts concerning the burial of Moses did not need to be "dictated," they only required a simple revelatory explanation for Moses to be able to pen the words.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 389.

¹² All translations in this study are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹³ S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973 reprint of 1895 ed.), 401.

Diagram 1: Deuteronomy 34:1-4

- 34.1 וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה
מֵעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב
אֶל־תֵּר נָבוּ ↔ רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה
אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי יְרֵחוֹ
וַיִּרְאֶהוּ יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ ↔ אֶת־הַגִּלְעָד
עַד־דָּן:
וְאֵת כָּל־נַפְתָּלִי 34.2
וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ אֲפֹרָיִם
וּמְנַשֶּׁה
וְאֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה
עַד תַּיִם הָאֲחֵרוֹן:
וְאֶת־הַנְּגֹב 34.3
וְאֶת־הַכָּפָר
בְּקַעַת יְרֵחוֹ ↔ עִיר הַתְּמָרִים
עַד־צֹעַר:
34.4 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
אֵלָיו



[1] So from the plains of Moab Moses ascended Mount Nebo, the summit of Pisgah, that was opposite Jericho. Then Yahweh showed him all the land: Gilead as far as Dan, [2] all of Naphtali, the region of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the region of Judah as far as the Western Sea, [3] the Negev, and the Kikkar [the Ghor] in the valley of Jericho, the city of palms, as far as Zoar. [4] Thus Yahweh said to him, “This is the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ *This is the land* that I showed you in your own sight, but you shall not go over there.”

34.1 נִיעַל מִשֶׁה¹⁴
 מֵעֵרְבַת מוֹאָב¹⁵
 אֶל־תֵּר נְבוֹ¹⁷ ↔ רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה¹⁶
 אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי יְרִיחוֹ¹⁸
 וַיִּרְאֶהוּ יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ²⁰ ↔ אֶת־הַגְּלֵעָד¹⁹

¹⁴ Verse initial: Exod 24:15. Verse medial: Exod 24:13. Verse final: Exod 19:20.

¹⁵ With ׀ preposition instead of ׀ן: Num 22:1; 26:3, 63; 33:48, 49, 50; 35:1; 36:13; Deut 34:8. With אֶל: Num 31:12.

¹⁶ Num 21:20; 23:14; Deut 3:27(רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה); עָלָהּ; note the employment of the same verb as 34:1—which is the fulfillment of the command given in 3:27; cf. 32:49 in fn 17, below). Without רֹאשׁ: Deut 3:17 and 4:49 (תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר־תַּחַת הַפְּסָגָה) in both verses). Deut 34:1 is the only occurrence of the two place names (הַפְּסָגָה and נְבוֹ) together.

¹⁷ Cf. : נְבוֹ (Num 33:47). Deut 34:1 is the record of obedience to Yahweh’s command in 32:49 — אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב (note the employment of the same verb collocated with the same preposition).

¹⁸ The exact phrase is found in Deut 32:49 immediately following the clause cited in fn 17, above. ׀ן יְרִיחוֹ is governed by the ׀ preposition in Num 22:1; 34:15. The same phrase is governed by עַל in 26:3, 63; 31:12; 33:48, 50; 35:1.

¹⁹ אֶת־הַגְּלֵעָד — Num 32:40; Deut 3:15. אֶת־הַגְּלֵעָד (׀) — Num 32:1, 29. וְכָל־הַגְּלֵעָד — Deut 3:10. וַיִּתֵּר הַגְּלֵעָד — Deut 3:13. גַּלְעָדָה — Num 32:39. בְּגַלְעָד — Deut 4:43. וְעַד־הַגְּלֵעָד — Deut 2:36. בְּמַגְלָעָד — Gen 37:25; מִן־הַגְּלֵעָד — Deut 3:16. הַר הַגְּלֵעָד — Gen 31:21, 23, 25; Deut 3:12. בְּעֵרֵי הַגְּלֵעָד — Num 32:26. Personal name: Num 26:29 (2x), 30; 27:1; 36:1.

²⁰ The Hiphil of רָאָה with deity as the subject is found as follows: Gen 41:28 (subject, הָאֱלֹהִים; direct object, “what God is about to do”; indirect object, אֶת־פַּרְעֹה); 48:11 (subject, אֱלֹהִים; object, Joseph’s offspring; indirect object, אֹתִי = Jacob/Israel); Exod 27:8 (subject, by context is understood to be יְהוָה, the one speaking [25:1]; direct object, the design for the Tabernacle’s bronze altar; indirect object, אֹתָן = Moses); Num 8:4 (subject, יְהוָה; direct object, the design for the Tabernacle’s menorah; indirect object, בַּמִּשְׁחָה); 23:3 (subject, יְהוָה; direct object, כֹּה [“whatever”]; indirect object, 1cs pronominal suffix referring to Balaam); Deut 4:36 (subject, יְהוָה; direct object, הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְדֹּלְתָהּ; indirect object, 2ms pronominal suffix referring to the nation of Israel); 5:24 (subject, יְהוָה; direct object, וְאֶת־אֶת־כְּבֹדִי וְאֶת־גְּדִלִי; indirect object, 1cpl pronominal suffix referring to the people of Israel). The same basic vocabulary is utilized to talk about the same event in Num 27:12 (אֶל־תֵּר אֶל־מִשְׁחָה עַל־הַר) — “So Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Ascend this Mount Abarim and see the land that I will give to the Israelites’”). See, also, Gen 13:14-15.

עַד־דָּן: ²¹	
וְאֵת כָּל־נַפְתָּלִי ²²	34.2
וְאֵת־אֶרֶץ אֲפֵרַיִם ²³	
וּבְנֵי־שֵׁשׁה	
וְאֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה ²⁴	
עַד הַיַּם הַיְאֻחָרֹן: ²⁵	
וְאֵת־הַנְּגֹב ²⁶	34.3
וְאֵת־הַכְּפָר ²⁷	
בְּקַעַת יְרֵחוֹ ²⁹ ↔ עִיר הַתְּמָרִים ²⁸	
עַד־צֹעַר: ³⁰	

²¹ עַד־דָּן is found only here and at Gen 14:14. “Though the Dan mentioned here is almost universally thought to be the Dan north of the Waters of Merom, which was so named after the Danite conquest of Laish during the period of the judges, it seems more likely that the Dan of Gen 14:14 and here (and possibly in 2 Sam 24:6) was a place in the north of Gilead. While such a place called Dan is not known from other sources, it would not be alone in that category. The Genesis narrative does not fit well at all with the Dan that had been Laish. . . . A Dan in Gilead better fits the description here, since the Dan north of the Waters of Merom could not be seen from Nebo” (Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 3:235.

²² This phrase occurs only here. Presumably due to their birth order, Naphtali follows Dan (as here) in Gen 30:7, 8; 35:25; 46:23, 24; Exod 1:4; Deut 27:13; 33:22, 23. In Gen 49:16-21 and Num 1:12-15 Gad and Asher interrupt this order. However, only Asher interrupts the order in Num 1:38-42; 2:25-29; 7:66-78; 10:25-27; 13:12-14; 26:42-48. In Num 34:22-28 the order is Dan, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali.

²³ This phrase occurs only here.

²⁴ With the exception of Deut 34:2, the earliest employment of יְהוּדָה is in Ruth 1:7. Many of the later uses, however, are not limited to just the tribal territory of Judah—the usual reference is to the entire southern kingdom.

²⁵ The same phrase is utilized in Deut 11:24. Elsewhere, הַיַּם הַיְאֻחָרֹן occurs only in Joel 2:20 and Zech 14:8.

²⁶ הַנְּגֹב is also employed in Gen 20:1; 24:62; Num 13:29; and 21:1. הַנְּגֹבָה, with the –directive, is found in Gen 12:9 and 13:1.

²⁷ Aside from Deut 34:2, הַכְּפָר as a geographical designation in the Pentateuch occurs only in the narrative about Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13:12; 19:17, 25, 28, 29).

²⁸ עִיר הַתְּמָרִים as a name for Jericho is found elsewhere only in Judg 1:16; 3:13; and 2 Chr 28:15. Only in 2 Chr 28:17 is it in apposition to יְרֵחוֹ as in Deut 34:3.

²⁹ Although the word בְּקַעַת is found in the Pentateuch (Gen 11:2; Deut 8:7; 11:11), בְּקַעַת יְרֵחוֹ occurs only here in the entire Hebrew Bible.

³⁰ עַד־צֹעַר is employed only here and Isa 15:5 in the Hebrew Bible. However, out of 10 references to the city of Zoar, all but two (Isa 15:5 and Jer 48:34) are in the Pentateuch (Gen 13:10; 14:2, 8; 19:22, 23, 30 [2x]; Deut 34:3).

31 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה 34.4
 אֵלָיו

זֹאת הָאָרֶץ³²
 אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי³³
 לְאַבְרָהָם
 לְיִצְחָק
 וְלַיַּעֲקֹב
 לֵאמֹר
 לְזֶרַעְךָ אֶתְנַנְּהָ³⁴
 הִרְאִיתִיךָ
 בְּעֵינַיִךָ³⁵
 וְשָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲבֹר³⁶

Verses 1-4 are so involved with the personal experience of Moses that no one would dare to claim that he was incapable of writing them. Some, however, would argue that there are elements in these verses that were outside the realm of Moses' knowledge. For example, how could he have known that Judah's territory would extend to the Mediterranean (v. 2)? Then there is the physical impossibility of being able to see Dan from Mount Nebo (v. 1). How could the account be taken literally? Some commentators take the description of what Moses saw as hyperbole "and must be taken as including points filled in by the imagination, as well as those actually visible to the eye."³⁷

Yet another question assails the reader: could Moses know where the tribal territories would be? Those boundaries were not described in detail until after the conquest (Josh 13–19). Because of questions like these, some commentators declare that

³¹ Exod 4:11 is the only other occurrence of וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו with Moses as the antecedent of the pronominal suffix. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוָה is employed in Exod 4:2 and 19:24.

³² זֹאת הָאָרֶץ as a noun clause followed by a relative clause occurs also in Num 34:13.

³³ הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי is phraseology already utilized in Exod 33:1; Num 14:23; Deut 10:11; 31:21, 23. Two variations occur: הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי (Deut 1:35) and הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי (Num 32:11; Deut 31:20). In addition, the indirect objects (לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיַּעֲקֹב) follow in Exod 33:1 (cf., also, Num 32:11 with הָאָרֶץ instead of הָאָרֶץ). The full phraseology is found only in the Pentateuch.

³⁴ Exod 33:1 includes this exact phraseology in addition to that discussed in footnote 33, above.

³⁵ הִרְאִיתִיךָ בְּעֵינַיִךָ is a *hapax phainomenon* in the Hebrew Bible. There are no other occurrences of Hiphil of רָאָה followed by בְּעֵינַיִךָ. However, the phraseology in connection with the next clause of Deut 34:4 is quite reminiscent of Deut 3:27 (וְרָאָה בְּעֵינַיִךָ כִּי לֹא תַעֲבֹר).

³⁶ לֹא תַעֲבֹר is also recorded as a divine prohibition to Moses crossing the Jordan into the land of promise in Deut 3:27 (see fn 35, above) and 31:2.

³⁷ Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 420.

the geographical details represented in Deuteronomy 34 were beyond the knowledge of Moses. Surprisingly, Eugene Merrill places himself within that circle by his claim that,

It is obvious that some of these place names are latter additions to the text (e.g., Dan, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah) inasmuch as they would not have been assigned to these sites until after the conquest, some years following Moses' death.³⁸

Merrill's position ignores the revelatory facts. Firstly, approximately 400 years before Moses Jacob had already indicated that land would be apportioned to Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:22). It is not an unusual nor an unexpected occurrence that land granted to an individual would be named for that individual (cf. Gen 36:21, 40 ["these are the names of the clans of Esau by families *and* by localities according to their names"]).³⁹ Secondly, in Deuteronomy 33:23 Moses himself ties Naphtali to a specific location within the land of promise ("take possession of the area south of the lake").⁴⁰ Unless Moses suffered some sort of stroke that left him mentally incapacitated immediately after he had delivered his final blessing in Deuteronomy 33, he certainly had a clear understanding of the post-conquest lay of the land. To deny Moses' knowledge of the geography of Canaan (even though he personally had never been there) would not only require that his final blessing was not actually spoken by him, but would also require that extensive portions of Genesis be removed from his authorship.

The anti-Mosaic argument is not a strong one because it assumes either that Moses never received any information from eyewitnesses about the lay of the land in Canaan (cf. the account of the twelve spies sent into the land who brought, presumably, a detailed report back to Moses in Num 13) or that God never gave him any special revelation about such details. Indeed,

While various geographical data have been proposed as post-Mosaic from time to time, it is difficult to prove the case one way or the other. The possibility may be admitted that editorial touches occurred in the post-Mosaic period but it is not easy to prove which of those proposed are genuinely post-Mosaic. Among those scholars who maintain an essentially Mosaic authorship opinions vary as to the precise extent of the post-Mosaica in Deuteronomy.⁴¹

³⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 ([Nashville, Tenn.]: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 452.

³⁹ Indeed, the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and 11 apply the names of the ancestral heads to the land area their descendants would occupy.

⁴⁰ Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 446. An alternate translation offered by Craigie ("The west and the south he will inherit") is possible, but seems unlikely since the tribal allotment of Naphtali was among the most northern. Cf. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 401.

⁴¹ Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 53.

Diagram 2: Deuteronomy 34:5-6

34.5 וַיָּמָת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה ↔ עֶבֶד־יְהוָה
בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב
עַל־פִּי יְהוָה:
34.6 וַיִּקְבֹּר אֹתוֹ
בְּגִי
בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב
מִזֶּל בֵּית פְּעוֹר
וְלֹא־יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת־קְבֻרָתוֹ
עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

[5] So Moses Yahweh’s servant died there in the land of Moab in accord with Yahweh’s word. [6] Then He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-Peor. No one knows his gravesite unto this day.

34.5 וַיָּמָת שָׁם⁴³ מֹשֶׁה ↔ עֶבֶד־יְהוָה⁴²
בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב
עַל־פִּי יְהוָה:⁴⁴
34.6 וַיִּקְבֹּר אֹתוֹ⁴⁵
בְּגִי⁴⁶
בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב
מִזֶּל בֵּית פְּעוֹר⁴⁷

⁴² עֶבֶד־יְהוָה מֹשֶׁה is phraseology utilized only here in the Pentateuch but 14 times in the Book of Joshua (1:1, 13, 15; 8:31, 33; 11:12; 12:6 [2x]; 13:8; 14:7; 18:7; 22:2, 4, 5). The concept, however, is not foreign to the Pentateuch—cf. Num 12:7 (לֹא־כֵן עֲבָדֵי מֹשֶׁה בְּכָל־בֵּיתִי נֶאֱמָן הוּא:) and 12:8 (בְּעֲבָדֵי בְּמֹשֶׁה). Such a self-reference is not unprecedented. Frevel (222) points to both Abraham (Gen 18:5) and Jacob (32:11).

⁴³ The same phraseology is employed in recording Aaron’s death on Mt. Hor (Num 33:38) as well as Miriam’s death at Kadesh (Num 20:1)

⁴⁴ Cf. וַיַּעַל אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־הָר הַהֵר עַל־פִּי יְהוָה וַיָּמָת שָׁם. (Num 33:38).

⁴⁵ Cf. the accounts of the deaths of Miriam (וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם וַתִּקְבֹּר שָׁם, Num 20:1) and Aaron (וַתָּמָת שָׁם אֶהֱרֹן וַתִּקְבֹּר שָׁם, Deut 10:6). “The expression *he buried him* might be translated ‘one buried him’, *i.e.* he was buried. The context suggests that it was Yahweh who buried Moses, although, no doubt, He had agents” (Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 319).

⁴⁶ The description of the valley where Moses was buried matches very closely the mention of the same valley in Num 21:20 (הַגִּיאֵ אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֵה מוֹאָב רֹאשׁ הַפְּסִגָּה), “the valley that is in the country of Moab at Pisgah Peak”). That might be the same location mentioned in Deut 3:29 and 4:46.

⁴⁷ מִזֶּל בֵּית פְּעוֹר is the same phrase found in Deut 3:29 and 4:46. See fn 46, above.

וְלֹא־יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת־קְבֻרָתוֹ⁴⁸
עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:⁴⁹

Would Moses ever refer to himself in the third person as “Moses the servant of Yahweh” (Deut 34:5)? Firstly, “one’s reference to oneself does not *a priori* preclude one’s being the author of the text. The use of the third person is common in early histories.”⁵⁰ For the exegete and expositor “the shift to the third person at least invites the reader to look at Moses from another perspective.”⁵¹ That perspective, in the Pentateuch and especially in Deuteronomy 34, is the divine perspective. It represents God’s own summation of Moses’ character and attributes. Just as Moses opened the Pentateuch with a divine account of Creation (to which no man was eyewitness) that God had revealed to him, so he concluded the Pentateuch with God’s assessment of the chosen messenger.⁵² Secondly, nothing is said in Deuteronomy 34 that had not already been revealed elsewhere in the Torah. In Numbers 11:11 Moses said to the Lord, “Why have you been so hard on Your servant?” It is an obvious reference to himself as the Lord’s servant. Moses was quite aware of his status as the Lord’s servant. He himself recorded the Lord’s statement that “My servant Moses . . . is faithful in all My household” (Num 12:17).

Could Moses have recorded that he died in the land of Moab (Deut 34:5)? Let’s respond with a question of our own: Did he not also record what the Lord had revealed to him in 32:50? God had already told Moses that he would die on Mount Nebo just “as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor.” No redactor was needed to record these facts. They were truly “according to the word of Yahweh” (34:5) that had been given to Moses personally.

What about Moses’ burial? Could he have written that the Lord Himself “buried him in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor” (34:6)? Moses would have had at least some idea that he would be buried somewhere either on the mountain or near it since his

⁴⁸ קְבֻרָתוֹ / קְבֻרָה had already been used in Gen 35:20 (2x) and 47:30.

⁴⁹ The term עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה is employed in Deuteronomy 59 times. עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, which occurs 84 times in the OT (13 in the Pentateuch, 6 of which are in Deuteronomy—2:22; 3:14; 10:8; 11:4; 29:3; 34:6), is not discussed in P. A. Verhoef, “עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 2:419-24. It is discussed, however, by M. Sæbø, “עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. by David E. Green (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 6:7-32 (esp. 15-16). The formulaic phrase “emphasizes the present status of the narrator (or redactor) or of what is narrated, but also—through the prep. ‘ad—the continued existence of a situation into this present” (ibid., 16). Interestingly, in “A Study of the Formula ‘Until This Day”” (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 82/3 [Sept 1963]: 279-92) Brevard Childs makes no mention of Deut 34:6.

⁵⁰ Block, “Recovering the Voice of Moses,” 392 fn 41.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Indeed, Deuteronomy ends the narrative begun in Genesis 1:1” (ibid., 402). Block takes the stance that “the ‘deuteronomic’ tone of much of Genesis-Numbers” (ibid.) is due to the final narrator of Deuteronomy. I would agree that that is both reasonable and likely, but I would insist that that final narrator was Moses himself. The shape and content of the Pentateuch was first of all divinely motivated, but was also the conflation of divine revelation and superintendence (2 Pet 1:21) with human expression and composition. No one was better qualified than the original writer to pen the concluding unit of the Torah.

sister Miriam had been buried near where she had died (Num 20:1) and his brother Aaron had been buried in much the same fashion (Deut 10:6). Moses witnessed both deaths and burials for his two siblings. He was fully aware of the cultural norms and what would happen with him at his own death. Beyond that, in Deut 32:50 Moses was given explicit revelation concerning his death and burial along with its similarity to the death and burial of his brother Aaron. However, Miriam and Aaron were not buried by God—unless we understand that phraseology to indicate merely “at Yahweh’s command.”

The real crux is the phrase “to this day” in 34:6. If language has any value, there must be a clear and acceptable understanding of this temporal reference. Dewey Beegle offers a tantalizing suggestion: “The fact that tradition did not know precisely where Moses was buried suggests strongly that Moses planned it that way.”⁵³ If Moses had planned it, he knew enough to be able to write, “No one knows his gravesite unto this day” (v. 6).

Diagram 3: Deuteronomy 34:7-8

34.7 וּמֹשֶׁה בֶּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה בָּמָוֶתוֹ
לֹא־כָהָתָה עֵינָיו
וְלֹא־נָס לְחָהּ:
34.8 וַיִּבְכּוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מֹשֶׁה
בְּעַרְבַת מוֹאָב
שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם
וַיִּתְמֹו יָמָי בְּכִי אֲבֵל מֹשֶׁה:

[7] Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye had not lost its sparkle nor had its power fled. [8] So the Israelites wept for Moses on the plains for Moab for thirty days and fulfilled the days of mourning for him.

34.7 וּמֹשֶׁה בֶּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה⁵⁴ בָּמָוֶתוֹ
לֹא־כָהָתָה עֵינָיו⁵⁵

⁵³ Dewey M. Beegle, *Moses, The Servant of Yahweh* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 347.

⁵⁴ The same kind of notation regarding age at death was provided for Aaron (וַאֲהֲרֹן בֶּן־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה בָּמָוֶתוֹ בְּהַר הַהָרִי, Num 33:39). Of course, Moses was aware of his own age (cf. 31:2; 16:16; 17:24; 21:5; 25:26; 41:46; 50:26; and Exod 7:7 (*Deuteronomy*, 417).

⁵⁵ A slightly different phrasing employing the same vocabulary was used in Gen 27:1 to describe Isaac in old age (וַיִּהְיֶה כִּי־יָקַן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְהַתֵּן עֵינָיו מֵרֵאֶת). George W. Coats classified the description of Moses’ unflinching eyesight as part of a heroic motif (“Legendary Motifs in the Moses Death Reports,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39/1 [Jan 1977]: 36): “The characterization appears overdrawn, unreal. Moses is almost superhuman, a figure whose attributes stretch the imagination beyond average human experience. That characterization typifies heroic legend.” Such a view might lend support to those who would deny Mosaic authorship to Deut 34.

וְלֹא־נָס לְחָהּ:⁵⁶
וַיִּבְכוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:⁵⁷ 34.8
בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב
שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם:⁵⁸
וַיִּתְמוּ יָמֵי בְכֵי אַבְרָם:⁵⁹ מֹשֶׁה:

Diagram 4: Deuteronomy 34:9

וַיְהוֹשֶׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון מְלֵא רוּחַ חָכְמָה 34.9
כִּי־סָמַךְ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדָיו
עָלָיו
וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֵלָיו בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

[9] Joshua the son of Nun was filled with a spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hand upon him. Therefore the Israelites obeyed him and they did just as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

וַיְהוֹשֶׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון מְלֵא רוּחַ חָכְמָה:⁶⁰ 34.9
כִּי־סָמַךְ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדָיו
עָלָיו
וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֵלָיו בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:⁶²

⁵⁶ The phrase occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible.

⁵⁷ Abraham had wept at the death of Sarah (Gen 23:2), Joseph wept over Jacob (50:1). All Israel wept at the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:6). Just prior to Moses' death, the Israelites had wept at the death of Aaron (וַיִּבְכוּ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן), Num 20:29).

⁵⁸ The same period of mourning was observed for Aaron (Num 20:29).

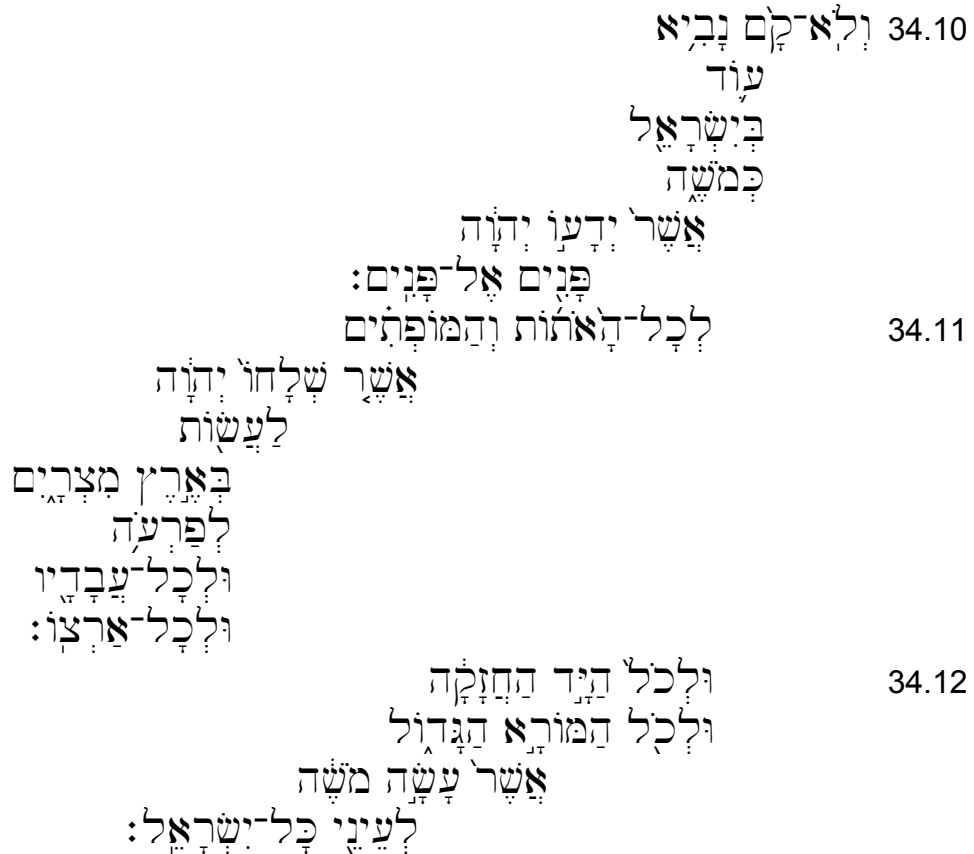
⁵⁹ A period of mourning (יָמֵי אַבְרָם) is already mentioned in Gen 27:41 (cf. 50:10, 11).

⁶⁰ מְלֵא רוּחַ חָכְמָה is a phrase found in Exod 28:3 concerning craftsmen for the Tabernacle. As for the Spirit being upon Joshua, see Num 27:18 (cf. fn 61, below).

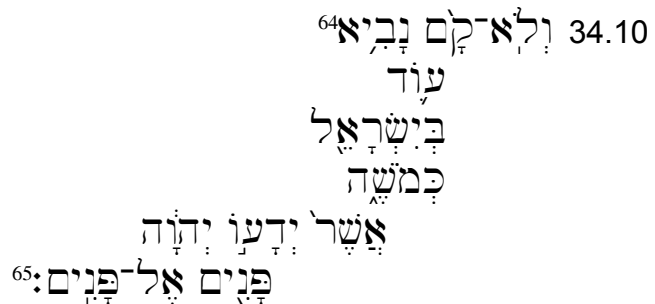
⁶¹ Note the divine instruction given to Moses to perform this commissioning of Joshua in Num 27:18 (וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה קַח־לְךָ אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־רוּחַ בּוֹ וְסָמַכְתָּ אֶת־יָדְךָ עָלָיו).

⁶² כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה is familiar phraseology in the Pentateuch (Exod 38:22; Lev 16:34; 24:23). Driver noted similar phraseology also in Lev 8:4; Num 20:27; 27:22; and 31:31 (*Deuteronomy*, 417).

Diagram 5: Deuteronomy 34:10-12



[10] A prophet has not arisen in Israel like Moses whom Yahweh knew face to face. [11] *A prophet has not arisen in Israel like Moses*⁶³ in regard to all the signs and miracles that Yahweh sent him to perform in the land of Egypt before Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his country. [12] *A prophet has not arise in Israel like Moses* in regard to all the display of power and the great awe that Moses produced in the sight of all Israel.



⁶³ Driver claimed that the phraseology of vv. 11-12 is Deuteronomic and that “their imperfect connexion with v.¹⁰ makes it improbable that they are the work of D; they are rather the work of a later (and inferior) Deut. Writer, who sought to supplement v. ¹⁰ by a notice of particulars in which it seemed to him to be deficient” (*Deuteronomy*, 425). But, cf. Frevel’s assessment of the syntax (225 and 227).

⁶⁴ The phraseology is similar to Deut 13:2 (כִּי־יָקוּם בְּקִרְבְּךָ נָבִיא).

34.11 לְכֹל־הָאֹתוֹת וְהַמִּוֹפְתִים⁶⁶
אֲשֶׁר שָׁחַח⁶⁷ יְהוָה
לַעֲשׂוֹת
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם
לְפָרְעָה
וּלְכָל־עַבְדָּיו
וּלְכָל־אֲרָצוֹ:⁶⁸

34.12 וּלְכֹל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה⁶⁹
וּלְכֹל הַמִּוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל⁷⁰
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה
לְעֵינֵי כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל:⁷¹

If Moses actually penned his own obituary, how should one understand verses 10-12 with their adulatory tone?

The words of praise and adulation of Moses that complete this section (vv. 10-12) have, with the previous reference to his death (vv. 5-8), convinced nearly all thoughtful students that Moses himself could not have written this last part of Deuteronomy.⁷²

What then do “thoughtful students” make of Moses writing about himself when he makes the grandiose claim of having argued with God on Mount Sinai (Exod 32:11-13)? Or, what about some sort of messianic complex that would allow Moses to pen the words of Deuteronomy 18:15-18 which are not ameliorated by a modest use of the more objective third person, but are in the first person (“a prophet like me,” v. 15)?⁷³ If “thoughtful” interpreters start down the road that would deny Mosaic authorship to any appearance of self-adulation, the result will be a fragmentation of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and

⁶⁵ Cf. Exod 33:11 (וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים) and Num 12:8 (כִּי אֶל־פָּה אֲדַבֵּר בּוֹ).

⁶⁶ The coordination of the two definite nouns for miracles is a phraseology found only in Deuteronomy (7:19; 29:2; 34:10).

⁶⁷ Reminiscent of Exod 4:28 (וַיִּגַּד מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן אֵת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁחַח וְאֵת כָּל־): (הָאֹתוֹת אֲשֶׁר צָנְחָהוּ).

⁶⁸ The rest of the verse is so saturated with the irrefutable vocabulary familiar to Moses as both participant and writer, that it does not need documentation other than to refer to Exodus 4–15.

⁶⁹ כָּל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה is easily perceived in בְּיַד הַחֲזָקָה (Exod 3:19; 6:1 [2x]; 13:9; 32:11; Num 20:20; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:8; 9:26; 26:8). הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה is specified in Deut 7:19 right after the reference to “the signs and the wonders” (cf. fn 66, above).

⁷⁰ The same basic phraseology is employed in Deut 4:34 and 26:8 together with the basic phraseology of הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה (cf. fn 69, above) and אֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים (cf. fn 66, above).

⁷¹ “The terms used in this final description of Moses’ ministry are common in the narratives of the Exodus and the desert journeys (see Exod 7:3; Num 14:11, 22; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 11:3; 26:8; 29:3)” (Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” 3:235).

⁷² Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 455.

⁷³ Space does not permit a full response to those who apply this same self-adulatory argument to identify Num 12:3 (“Moses was more humble/meek than any man on the face of the earth”) as a redactor’s insert.

Deuteronomy beyond most evangelicals' comfort zone—placing us more in the critical camp by exploding the Torah into innumerable fragments that had been somehow brought together by a series of redactors. Instead of focusing on Moses' view of himself, why not stress what such descriptions of the servant say about his Lord? As Beegle rightly observed, “The leading role in the whole story is Yahweh's. Moses was a gifted man, but it was only by Yahweh's grace that he lived to exercise those gifts.”⁷⁴ Gerhard von Rad echoes the thought:

Not a single one of all these stories, in which Moses is the central figure, was really written about Moses. Great as was the veneration of the writers [sic] for this man to whom God had been pleased to reveal Himself, in all these stories it is not Moses himself, Moses the man, but God who is the central figure. *God's* words and *God's* deeds, these are the things that the writers [sic] intend to set forth.⁷⁵

In the midst of his discussion of the problem of Numbers 12:3, Ronald Allen admits that it “is theoretically possible that Moses might have authored such a line under inspiration, just as it is possible that he might have recorded the account of his death and burial by prophetic insight (Deut 34). These things are possible but not likely.”⁷⁶ Why are such things “not likely”? After arguing that an editor must have inserted the problematic verse, Allen suggests a viable resolution to the interpretive difficulty. He offers Cleon Rogers' suggestion that adopting the *Qere'* (ענין) would make it possible for Moses to have written that he “was a very miserable⁷⁷ man, more miserable than anyone else on the face of the earth.” Such a solution actually removes that which caused the objection to Mosaic authorship. I would argue that many a passage utilized “as a cudgel against those who believe in the Mosaic authorship of the Torah”⁷⁸ might very well have viable solutions that might also allow the interpretation-based objection to lose its foothold.

One potential solution would be to translate עָלָה with the future tense (“A prophet will not arise in Israel like Moses”). The same verb was utilized in reference to a future royal figure in Numbers 24:17 (כּוֹכַב מִיַּעֲקֹב וְקֶדֶשׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל), “a star will appear out of Jacob and a scepter will arise out of Israel.”⁷⁹

Moses' prophetic office is significant in the overall structure and content of the Pentateuch even though it specifically refers to that office only twice (Deut 18:15-18; 34:10). The major poetic pericopes of the Pentateuch (Gen 49; Num 22-24; Deut 33) are prophetic. They are strategically placed prior to major transitions in the overall flow of the narrative: “the death of Jacob and the end of the ancestral stories in Genesis 50, the death of the Exodus generation in Numbers 25-26, the death of Moses in Deuteronomy

⁷⁴ Beegle, *Moses*, 347-48.

⁷⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Moses*, World Christian Books 32, Second Series (New York: Association Press, n.d.), 8-9.

⁷⁶ Ronald B. Allen, “Numbers,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 2:798.

⁷⁷ Cleon Rogers, “Moses: Meek or Miserable?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29/3 (Sept 1986): 257-63.

⁷⁸ Allen, “Numbers,” 2:798.

⁷⁹ The use of in Deut 31:16 is also future, but it is not preceded by a *qatal*. It is preceded by a participle that could be classified as an imminent future.

34.”⁸⁰ Indeed, Deuteronomy 34 is the expected conclusion of the Pentateuch when the Mosaic corpus is viewed in the light of the major transitional pericopes.

Conclusion

The current tendency among evangelical scholars is to read Deuteronomy 34 in a typical twenty-first century non-supernaturalistic mindset (which does not mean that they deny supernaturalism, miracles, or divine inspiration of Scripture—just that the non-supernaturalistic mindset is too easily adopted unless we are forced to abandon a more natural explanation). Consistent with the norms of a post-biblical and modern frame of reference, the two statements in verses 6 and 10 appear to require that someone other than Moses wrote them.

The account of Moses’ death appears to have been added to the end of the Pentateuch long after the event. By the time this chapter was written, the burial of Moses was so far in the past that the location of his grave was uncertain to the writer: “To this day no one knows where his grave is” (v. 6). Furthermore, a long succession of prophets has come and gone so that the writer can say, “Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses” (v. 10). Though added later, this chapter plays a major role in the interpretation of the Pentateuch in its final form.⁸¹

For some biblical scholars, like Römer and Brettler, the final form of the Pentateuch (specifically, the composition of Deuteronomy 34 as its conclusion) “reflects a conscious effort by the redactors to create a Hexateuch.”⁸² In other words, the chapter is the work of a late editor attempting to provide a hinge for tying the Torah to subsequent sacred history.

Perhaps evangelicals have allowed themselves to adopt aspects of critical scholarship that are inherently inimical to divine revelation and to a supernaturalist frame of reference. Rather than seeking a solution that preserves the integrity, unity, and early date of a biblical book like Deuteronomy or a corpus like the Torah, we too readily adopt a more naturalistic interpretation that would appear equally obvious to the unbelieving mind. As Cleon Rogers so aptly demonstrated in regard to the problem of Numbers 12:3, there is no need to start back pedaling when the text appears to challenge the concept of Mosaic authorship. Sometimes that back pedaling ignores the obvious: Moses already knew that which the reader at first thinks would be impossible for him to know. The standards by which Moses is denied authorship sometimes reflects either an outright rejection of Mosaic authorship for large portions of the Torah (e.g., Gen 48-49 and Deut 32-33) or at least an ignorance that would deny Moses knowledge of the future that even Jacob had possessed, verbalized, and passed on to subsequent generations long before Moses recorded it. It is as though Moses had become senile in his last days, forgetting those things which he had already written, the experiences of his own lifetime, and the special revelation which God had repeatedly granted him. Indeed, as the last factor would

⁸⁰ James W. Watts, “The Legal Characterization of Moses in the Rhetoric of the Pentateuch,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117/ (Fall 1998): 421.

⁸¹ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 478.

⁸² Römer and Brettler, “Deuteronomy 34,” 416.

indicate, “the question of Mosaic authorship is a timely one and is, at bottom, a theological one.”⁸³

We are left with these ultimate questions: (1) Was Moses truly as great a prophet as the Scriptures make him out to be—great enough to have been granted revelation concerning a few select events following his death? (2) Are there any viable options for understanding verses 6 and 10 in a way that would preserve Mosaic authorship? The answer to the first is a resounding “Yes.” The second question deserves greater attention in the years ahead.

Where is the boundary of evangelicalism? It allows for adherents to Mosaic authorship of the total Torah while at the same time having room for a frank and open debate over passages that would seem to present evidence contrary to Mosaic authorship for every word and phrase. It appears, unfortunately, that the current boundary has been drawn so as to exclude Mosaic authorship of the totality of the Pentateuch—as though it were the soul-mate of a “flat earth” theology/science.

⁸³ Duane L. Christensen and Marcel Narucki, “The Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32/4 (Dec 1989): 466. These two scholars, however, opt to view Deuteronomy as the product of “God himself, at work through a long chain of poet-prophets” (471).

Appendix

In the spirit of Cleon Roger's proposal of a solution to Numbers 12:3 that would allow it to remain within the realm of Mosaic authorship, I offer the following preliminary outline regarding one of the texts often marked as an obvious post-Mosaic addition.

“Ur of the Chaldeans” (Gen 11:28, 31): A Model for Dealing with Difficult Texts

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- 1.0 The Hebrew text in Genesis 11:28 and 31 contains the phrase אֵינֶר כְּשָׂדִים (“Ur of the Chaldeans”). This is variously treated as an anachronism¹ or an example of post-Mosaic textual updating.²
- 2.0 Is there any viable option other than either of the above opinions? Is there evidence that might indicate that the text could have been written as is by Moses himself?
 - 2.1 **Linguistic Evidence:** The phenomenon of a phonetic shift of the sibilant (שׁ) followed by a dental (ד) to a *lamed* is well-recognized as a peculiarity of the Akkadian language. It appeared in the 2nd millennium B.C. and continued until the Neo-Babylonian era.³ Therefore, the form employed in

¹ “[T]he epithet ‘of the Chaldaeans’ is probably anachronistic in Abram’s day, since the Chaldaeans (Assyrian *Kaldu*) did not penetrate Babylonia till about 1000 B.C. It therefore most likely represents a gloss on the old tradition”—Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 272. “A later editor or scribe was aware of more than one city called ‘Ur’ in the ancient Near East. Since the Chaldeans did not exist in the ancient world until nearly a thousand years after Abram’s day, the designation ‘of the Chaldeans’ was without question added by a later scribe in order to distinguish which Ur was meant”—Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 78.

² This textual updating takes upon itself the flavor of each individual viewpoint theologically and canonically. John H. Sailhamer (“Genesis,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Regency Reference Library/Zondervan Publish House, 1990], 2:110) attributes the updating to an editor who desired to make “Abraham prefigure all those future exiles who, in faith, wait for the return to the Promised Land.” That post-exilic editor, therefore, is harmonizing the text of Genesis with the texts of later prophets to make the association with Babylon. Such an approach to textual updating is more than just a minor addition to clarify which Ur for later readers.

³ Anson Rainey, “Chaldea, Chaldeans,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), 5:330.

Gen 11:28 and 31 is perfectly consistent with Mosaic authorship and an older tradition, rather than a later editorial alteration of the text.⁴

2.2 Genealogical Evidence: Even Anson Rainey accepts the possibility that Abraham's nephew Kesed (Gen 22:21) was the ancestor of the Chaldeans. There is adequate time for the descendants of Kesed to have returned to their family's ancestral home in Ur and to have established their own reputation long before the time of Moses. Moses's reference to the Chaldeans in Gen 11:28 and 31 could be nothing more than identifying Ur as the home or sphere of influence for the descendants of Kesed.

It is also possible that the Chaldeans (Kasdim) antedate Kesed. It is possible that Arpachshad (Gen 10:22, son of Shem, ancestor of Abraham) was the ancestor of the Chaldeans—the last three letters of Arpachshad are the same as for Kesed and the Kasdim.⁵ The identity of Arpachshad is yet to be resolved by the experts.

2.3 Historical Evidence: The primary problem here is that the earliest extrabiblical⁶ reference to the Chaldeans does not occur until Ashurnasipal II or III (883-859 B.C.) mentions them.⁷ Oppenheim felt compelled to note the correspondence between the rise of the Chaldeans to power in the 9th century B.C. and the earlier rise of the dynasty of Hammurapi—"one can hardly close one's eyes to the similarities in events and personalities."⁸ The reign of Hammurapi (1792-1750 B.C.) preceded Moses by over 300 years. Could it be that earlier members of the Kasdim were involved in the

⁴ Rainey (see fn 3, above) offers the suggestion that the "Aramaic dialect of the Chaldeans no doubt preserved the original sibilant, and the biblical form evidently came from an Aramaic source, probably by direct contact with the Chaldeans" (ibid.). Moses was well aware of the Aramean origins of Abraham and his family (unless, of course, one were to deny him authorship of Gen 10:22, 31:47, and Deut 26:5).

⁵ "[T]he first part of the name could reflect Hurrian *Arip-*, which is a common element in personal names; but the rest would not be a demonstrably Hurrian component. The best that one can say today is that Arpachshad, if correctly transmitted, has to be regarded as non-Semitic. This would fit well enough with what we know today about the composite ethnic background of the Hebrews"—E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1964), 70. Cf., also, J. Simons, "The 'Table of Nations' (Genesis 10): Its General Structure and Meaning," in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1—11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, Ind.: 1994), 246 (reprinted from *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 10 (1954): 155-84; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1—11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 512: "H. Gunkel and others had already assumed that the name must stand for Babylon, and J. Skinner supported this very strongly. Babylon, he says, cannot be missing from the list. He also alleges in its favor that the three last consonants correspond to the Bab. *kashdu*, the Hebr. Kasdim (= Chaldeans). This is but a conjecture and does not explain the name fully. However, it is certainly correct that Arpachshad stands for Babylon here."

⁶ Note carefully the subtle implications of questioning the integrity of "the Chaldeans" as part of the original Mosaic text: the older biblical text is thereby subjugated to the later secular texts. The testimony of the secular texts is given greater authority than the biblical text. This contradicts the principle of *prima facie* evidence as well as traditional Christian theology that has refused to consider extrabiblical evidences or proofs as having the greater authority.

⁷ Rainey, "Chaldea, Chaldeans," 5:330.

⁸ A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 163.

rise of Babylon as well as having a sphere of influence in the vicinity of Ur? It is entirely possible—especially if there are either Amorite or Aramean connections in these two situations separated by approximately 900 years.

- 3.0 Conclusion:** Although the problem has not been fully resolved to date, there are better options than either the anachronistic view or the textual updating view.
- 3.1** The available evidence makes it possible that Moses himself specified that Abraham was from “Ur of the Chaldeans.” A Mosaic use of **כְּשָׁדִים** is consistent with the chronology of the phonetic shift.
- 3.2** There is more than adequate time for the descendants of either Kesed or Arpachshad to establish themselves in the region of Ur prior to the time of Moses. Indeed, there is time for the descendants of the latter to be thus established prior to the time of Abraham.
- 3.3** Silence in the realm of archaeology and secular history is a notoriously weak argument. The fraction of surviving material evidence that has been located, excavated, identified, and published is so infinitesimally small that it is not a sound practice to leap to the conclusion that what we do have is sufficient to overturn a direct declaration of the biblical text or to put traditionally held Mosaic authorship in question. The Hittites were unknown outside the OT until the late 1800’s and the ultimate extrabiblical proofs were not unearthed until after 1906. Look at the silence concerning the existence of King David until the discovery of the Tel Dan Stela in 1993.⁹
- 3.4** Ultimately, this particular problem (and all others like it) boils down to a choice for the interpreter: (a) Seek to harmonize the *apparent* contradiction between the biblical text and the present state of obviously limited extrabiblical knowledge—if need be, by providing yet another hypothetical that lacks proof and that goes contrary to established evangelical doctrine; or, (b) accept the text as it stands, choosing to look for options that allow it to stand without modification of either the declaration or the authorship—admitting that the real problem is the

⁹ In addition to these examples, it should be pointed out that if the same arguments concerning the Chaldeans were to be applied to the Arameans, the mention of Arameans in the Pentateuch (Gen 24:10 [**אַרְרָם בְּנֵי אַרְרָם**]; 25:20 [**אַרְרָם בְּנֵי אַרְרָם**]; 28:5 [**בְּנֵי אַרְרָם**]; 31:20 [**אַרְרָם**], 24 [**אַרְרָם**], 47 [Laban’s use of Aramaic]; Num 23:7 [**אַרְרָם**]; Deut 26:5 [**אַרְרָם**]) would also be treated as either anachronistic (thus Abraham Malamat, “Aram, Arameans,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* [Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971], 3:253) or an example of textual updating. The earliest clear reference to the Arameans in extrabiblical sources is in the cuneiform annals of Tiglath-pileser I (1116-1076 B.C.)—*ibid.*, 3:254; Wayne T. Pitard, “Arameans,” in *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, ed. Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 210.

absence of extrabiblical confirmation and our ignorance rather than a need to reconsider established evangelical doctrine.