

Examples of some discrepancies in the Pentateuch

While anachronisms are quoted widely, narrative discrepancies are also seen as evidence of post Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Narrative discrepancies represent perceived textual inconsistencies, differences, or disagreements within the narrative. And some discrepancies can be attributed to copyist errors as discussed in this article *The Reality of Copyists' Errors* by B. Thompson and E. Lyons.

One common example is Genesis 21:14. In this apparent discrepancy, Sarah has Hagar expelled from the family when Ishmael is a young man around the age of 14 - 17. Destructive critics of the late 1800s based their criticism on the translation of the Septuagint version of Genesis 21:14:

And Abraam rose up in the morning and took loaves and a skin of water, and gave them to Agar, and he put the child on her shoulder, and sent her away, and she having departed wandered in the wilderness near the well of the oath. (Septuagint version – Gen 21:14)

From this translation, destructive critics ask how it is possible for Hagar to carry this young man Ishmael on her shoulders?

It is a valid question; however, the Septuagint is well known to have many corruptions in its text. The collection of scriptures that make up the Septuagint has a complicated and varied translation history including a Hebrew book translated more than once, revisions to particular Greek translations, and instances of modifications and amplifications. Thus, while it is worthy for study and consultation, it is not a manuscript used for the basis of today's Old Testament translations.

The more accurate ben Asher text (Leningrad Manuscript B19a), used as the basis of many contemporary translations, indicates the translation of Genesis 21:14 as:

So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. (NASB – Gen 21:14)

This apparent narrative discrepancy used by destructive critics, and repeated often today, is based on a manuscript that was produced in a manner that did not have the fidelity of Massoretic traditions.

Aaron's death represents an example of a geographical discrepancy that is used as evidence that the Pentateuch is a compilation of various sources. Critics point out that Aaron was buried in two different places: did Aaron die on Mount Hor or in Moserah?

Numbers 20:27-28 – Mount Hor

So Moses did just as the LORD had commanded, and they went up to **Mount Hor** in the sight of all the congregation. After Moses had stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar, Aaron died there on the mountain top. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.

Numbers 33:38-39 – Mount Hor

Then Aaron the priest went up to **Mount Hor** at the command of the LORD, and died there in the fortieth year after the sons of Israel had come from the land of Egypt, on the first day in the fifth month. Aaron was one hundred twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor.

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Deuteronomy 10:6 - Moserah

(Now the sons of Israel set out from Beeroth Bene-jaakan to **Moserah**. There Aaron died and there he was buried and Eleazar his son ministered as priest in his place.

It is believed that Moserah is the name of the district where Mount Hor is located. A similar example is seen in Horeb, which is the name of the mountain complex where Mount Sinai is located. However, current extrabiblical literature does not answer the question of whether Moserah was the regional name for the area of Mount Hor.

The absence of knowing the precise definition of geographical terms has led to some confusion and fuel for those who challenge Mosaic authorship; yet, it is intellectually disingenuous to fail to consider that current scholarship does not fully understand the ancient Hebrew's use of geographical terms.

Another apparent narrative discrepancy that is often quoted is the disbelief that the events of Numbers 21 through 36 all took place in the span of 6 months. During this time the nation of Israel mourned the death of Aaron for 30 days (Num 20:23-29), the Caananites of Arad were defeated in the Negev (Num 21:1-3), Sihon king of the Amorites was defeated (Num 21:2-35; Deut 2:24-36), judgment against apostasy at Peor (Num 25:1-18), the census at the Moab plains by the Jordan River near Jericho (Num 26:1-63), Og king of Bashan was defeated (Num 21:33-35; Deut 3:1-7), and the Midianites were destroyed (Num 31:1-24).

In making this statement, critics have failed to include the context to the biblical narrative.

A possible and approximate route take from Mount Hor to an area opposite Jericho, including the distance to confront the Caananites of Arad, is about 340 miles and would take about 19 days to travel. The campaign against Sihon king of the Amorites was along the way.

The travel time of 19 days, not including the time for the Arad and Amorite campaigns, was based on the travel time from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea. According to Moses, this 200 miles distance was covered in 11 days (Deut 1:2).

The campaign against Og king of Bashan was roughly a round trip of 200 miles north of the crossing point of the Jordan River.

While many of the ancient locations remain unknown, the travel itinerary was detailed and specific (Num 33:1-49). Despite not knowing where the Promised Land was, the Hebrews were impatient to get to there, and were frustrated with taking a circuitous route (Num 21:4).

The number of men available for military service was 601,730 (Num 26:2-51).

The itinerant Hebrew nation was highly organized. Lead by a hierarchy of leaders, the nation was organized in groups as small as 10. (Deut 1:15)

After the campaign against Sihon king of the Amorites, God placed the dread of defeat on Israel's enemies (Deut 2:25).

Only 12,000 Hebrew soldiers were sent to destroy the Midianites and their five kings (Num 31:4-6), and all of them returned from battle (Num 31:48-50).

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When one subtracts the 30 days of mourning and the approximate total travel time of 30 days to arrive at the jump off point into the Promised Land, the nation of Israel has roughly 120 days to complete all the activities commanded by God. So this alleged narrative discrepancy was a consequence of examining the biblical text without its context.

Discrepancies do exist and contribute to the difficulty of understanding the Bible; however, the source of many of them has been determined and no longer is contradictory to the biblical text. The few examples highlighted here demonstrate the variety of causes that have been identified: errors of the copyists, the practice of using multiple names for people and places, and misunderstanding the context of the passage.

Because much remains unknown the Ancient Near East and its literature, perhaps too much has been made about this in an attempt to discredit Mosaic authorship. History continues to show that as more is learned, the truthfulness of the Bible continues to be affirmed.