

WHO WROTE THE TORAH, WHEN, WHERE, AND WHY?

IN HIS “General Introduction to the Torah,” Rabbi Gunther Plaut lays out in broad lines liberal Judaism’s answer to this question.

Does God have anything to do with the Torah? While God is not the author of the Torah in the fundamentalist sense, the Torah is a book about humanity’s understanding of and experience with God. We believe it is possible to say: The Torah is ancient Israel’s distinctive record of its search for God. The Torah tradition testifies to a people of extraordinary spiritual sensitivity. God is not the author of the text, the people are; but God’s voice may be heard through theirs if we listen with open minds. Is this true for every word and verse? Not in our view.¹

There are those who would argue that this is not true for *any* word or verse, and recently some well-known atheists have written powerful books to support their position.² But they can’t say with complete certainty that Rabbi Plaut’s hypothesis is wrong any more than he can say with certainty that theirs is wrong. Where Rabbi Plaut and the atheists do agree is that God did not write the Torah, people did.

Who were these people? When did they write the Torah? Where did they write it? And, most important of all, why did they write it?

The keys to answering these questions lie in the text of the Torah itself and its relation to the real ancient history of the Jewish people