

The Timing of the Old Testament's Composition



The author of *Deuteronomy*, the last book of the Pentateuch, indirectly denies the claim that Moses wrote these books by stating:

“And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is” (Deuteronomy 34:5–6, NIV).

This passage even implies, in a roundabout way, that Moses himself was a mythical figure.

Throughout the Old Testament, expressions such as “to this day” are frequently found. This suggests that the text was not written contemporaneously with the events it describes, but rather much later.

“The ancient Jewish people were continually exposed to invasions by foreign powers. In 922 BCE it was Egypt, in 700 BCE Assyria, in 586 BCE Babylon, in 332 BCE Alexander the Great of Macedonia, in 198 BCE Syria, and finally in 63 BCE Rome. Afterward they remained a vassal state until their complete destruction by Rome in 112 CE.” (1)

In this context, it appears that the Jews created the Pentateuch as a myth to elevate their national pride and portray an image of an independent state.

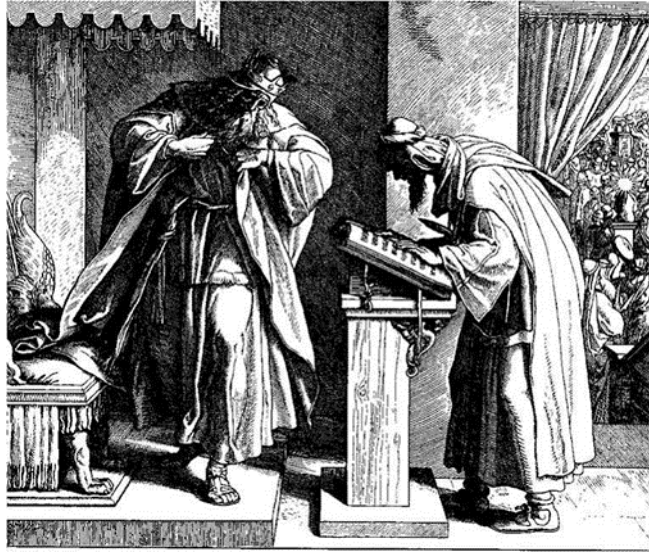
Scholars also note that:

"The covenantal format between Yahweh and the Israelites in Deuteronomy resembles the vassal treaties of Assyria from the early 7th century BCE. Deuteronomy's planned speeches, blessings and curses, and ritual dedications for new settlements show strong parallels with early Greek literature. In short, there is little doubt that the original Deuteronomy is the 'Book of the Law' mentioned in 2 Kings." (2)

It seems likely that Deuteronomy was originally authored by Hilkiah, and then subsequently supplemented and edited multiple times by various writers. These additions continued until the Hasmonean Kingdom, during which Greek literary influences also became evident.

"Excavations have revealed that before the late 8th century BCE there was no widespread literacy in Judah. Moreover, the stories of the patriarchs are filled with allusions to the later realities of the monarchy, particularly the 7th century BCE." (3)

According to 2 Kings 22 (and 2 Chronicles 34), the priest Hilkiah discovered the Book of Deuteronomy around 620 BCE in the Temple. Hilkiah, a priest who had come from the fallen northern kingdom of Israel, won the favor of King Josiah and authored Deuteronomy. This makes Deuteronomy the earliest written text of the Old Testament. From this book, the Deuteronomistic History—*Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings*—was composed. Meanwhile, priests from Judah also produced their own documents focusing on Yahweh.



Hilkiah's Discovery of Deuteronomy

A decisive indication that the Old Testament was written only after this point is found in 1 Kings 13:2, where Jeroboam (922–901 BCE) is confronted by a prophecy that explicitly mentions King Josiah (640–609 BCE)—a historical impossibility unless written later.

When Josiah attempted to strengthen his monarchy, priests of the “Shiloh” tradition from the north gained real power. The term *Shiloh* appears only in Jeremiah among the prophetic books, but also in Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, and 1 Kings. This shows that Shiloh priests, or Jeremiah himself, were heavily involved in composing these books. Genesis 49:10 also speaks of “until Shiloh comes” (KJV; NIV softens this phrase), referring to events after the fall of Israel and the migration of its refugees into Judah. The word *Shiloh* also appears in Psalm 78:60, found in “the psalms of Asaph,” which suggests that at least Psalms 73–83 (Book III of Psalms) were composed after Jeremiah’s time.

Since Chronicles recounts the events of both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, it must have been written after the fall of Israel in 722 BCE. Proverbs likewise appears to have been written after 700 BCE, and Isaiah after the return from the Babylonian

exile. Thus, the Old Testament as a whole is more reasonably seen as a post-exilic product.

The Hasmonean Period

In fact, many prophetic books were likely not written immediately after the return from Babylon but during the Hasmonean Kingdom (2nd–1st centuries BCE), when the ruling elite sought to solidify their identity.

"During this time, the books we now call the Tanakh (the Old Testament) were written, edited, and revised. The purpose was to mythically legitimize the Hasmonean Kingdom's ambition to rule all of Palestine." (5)

The Book of Daniel, for example, was composed during or after the Hasmonean era. Daniel 8:14 mentions 2,300 evenings and mornings until the sanctuary would be reconsecrated. This corresponds exactly to the period after Antiochus IV (216–164 BCE; ruler of Judea 169–163 BCE) and the rise of the Hasmonean Kingdom, proving that Daniel was written only after these events.

Mentions of Greece (*Hellas*) appear in Zechariah 9:13 ("I will rouse your sons, Zion, against your sons, Greece") and Acts 20:2, while "Grecia" appears in Daniel 8:21, 10:20, 11:2, Joel 3:6, and Acts 6:1, 9:29, and 11:20. These references confirm a post-Hellenistic context for these writings.

Since Judah Maccabee defeated the Seleucid Empire in 161 BCE and established the Hasmonean Kingdom, the fact that such history is included means these books were written after this point. Daniel, Zechariah, Joel, and Malachi likely all stem from this era, and the same may hold true for other prophetic writings. At minimum, they were edited during or after this time.

Isaiah appears to have at least three authors, Zechariah two, and Jeremiah more than one author or editor. Beyond these larger divisions, both Old and New Testaments underwent countless interpolations and revisions depending on religious needs. Larger editorial insertions occurred before translations into other languages, while later changes often involved wording or phrasing.

Conclusion

From the above, it is clear that the Old Testament—especially the Pentateuch—is largely fictitious. Yet Jews, Christians, and Muslims continue to believe that its stories describe real events and genuine prophecies. Despite overwhelming evidence of errors, clergy still insist on blind faith in the texts, often concealing inconvenient truths. Islam adopts the Old Testament's history wholesale, honoring figures such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Solomon, and John the Baptist as prophets akin to Jesus or Muhammad. Remarkably, even Mormonism fully embraces the Old Testament narrative.

Sources:

1. *The Jesus Mysteries*, Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, Three Rivers Press, 1999: 178
2. *The Bible Unearthed*, Israel Finkelstein & Neil Asher Silberman, trans. Oh Seong-hwan, Kkachi, 2002: 327–328
3. *The Bible Unearthed*, Israel Finkelstein & Neil Asher Silberman, trans. Oh Seong-hwan, Kkachi, 2002: 377
4. *Who Wrote the Bible?*, Richard E. Friedman, HarperCollins, 1989: 122
5. *The Laughing Jesus*, Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, Three Rivers Press, 2005: 39