

What is known:

In very rough chronological form:

Bronze Age

EB	~3500-2200	First "urban" period
Interm. B	2200-2000	Collapse. Nomadism (traces). Amorite hypothesis
MB	2000-1550	Second "urban" period. De Vaux hypothesis.
LB	1550-1150	collapse of urban period. Sea Peoples at end.

Iron Age

Iron I	1150-900	Early Aramaean development (Mazar theory)
Iron II	900-800	early monarchies of Israel and (later) Judah
Iron III	800-700?	The "Assyrian century"

What is disputed

The veracity of the pre-state traditions on:

1. the ancestral traditions: how historical is the cycle of traditions about the patriarchs (Genesis)?
2. the nature, date, extent of the stay in Egypt and the Exodus (Exodus).
3. the settlement in Canaan (Joshua)
4. the extent of the first kingdom, its unity (stories regarding Saul, David and Solomon in the books of Samuel and Kings)

When reading the Bible, a basic impression is that traditions have been accumulated and that there is a historical perspective underlying the choice of traditions. How to explain the pre-state traditions?

- a) The documentary hypothesis (XIXth c. / Wellhausen), proposes 4 documents underlying the early biblical traditions (J/E, D, P). In the absence of much archaeology, some scholars suggest that the Bible as we have it is an exilic (ca -586) and post-exilic document.
- b) Archaeological discoveries in Egypt and Mesopotamia, later on in the whole Levant, force a re-examination of all early traditions. Scepticism regarding the accounts of origin (creation, flood, original dispersion) extends to the cycle of stories re. the patriarchs, the Exodus, the occupation of Canaan.

Four possibilities essentially, which can be shaded *ad infinitum* (Gottwald, pp. 159-160) or combined in a variety of proposals:

1. Some of these traditions come from the pre-state period and survive as fragments in the traditions as we have them now. In other words, they reflect a contemporary or near-contemporary story-telling and tradition-building. On what basis can one account for this intellectual activity, and what form could it take (oral traditions? tied to existing tribal and clan groups? put down in writing according to what criteria and at what time? How pristine could they be kept? How would one know?).

2. Many (a majority of?) traditions as ensconced in the Pentateuch or the Hexateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, + Joshua) could have been created at an early stage of state formation in Israel and Judah. J and E would be the modern appellations of these documents. This is a very common view, found enshrined in chronologies, e.g.
3. A more sceptical and politically interested hypothesis, perhaps more easily synchronized with recent archaeological discoveries and reinterpretations of the archaeological data, would propose that some (or many) of these "early" traditions are in fact created near the end of the state of Judah, when it tried to expand and to explain this expansion, or (more to my liking) soon after the end of the state of Judah, to explain the catastrophe: referred to as the Deuteronomistic history (Joshua to Kings).
4. "A fourth alternative," (language of Gottwald, *Politics of Ancient Israel*, pp. 159-160) is that "many or all of the traditions were created under scribal/priestly auspices during the reconstitution of Judah as an enclave within the Persian or Hellenistic empire as part of the foundation myth of this religiocultural community." This is normally referred to as the P document and the Chronicler's history. For some (the so-called "Copenhagen school," it includes all the pentateuch and deuteronomical traditions).

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