

Who Wrote the Bible?

A Conservative Historical Overview of Authorship Across Biblical Sections

Torah Authorship

Traditionally attributed to Moses, the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) has been central to Jewish identity and law. Conservative scholarship maintains the essential Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, recognizing that Moses, as the covenant mediator (Deut 31:24), was capable of recording legal, historical, and theological texts.

While critical scholarship posits the Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP), conservative scholars like Gleason L. Archer (2007) and Kenneth Kitchen (2003) challenge its assumptions, emphasizing the coherence and early cultural consistency of the Pentateuch. Kitchen defends the plausibility of Mosaic authorship based on Late Bronze Age legal and treaty parallels. Richard E. Averbeck (2021) notes that Deuteronomy reflects Hittite treaty structures typical of the 14th–13th century BCE, supporting a Mosaic context rather than a late composition.

Nonetheless, some editorial activity likely occurred after Moses, such as Deuteronomy 34 (Moses' death), with scribal updates preserving the original voice while adapting for subsequent generations (cf. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 2007).

Prophets (Nevi'im)

The Former Prophets (Joshua–Kings) and Latter Prophets (Isaiah–Malachi) contain historical narratives and divine oracles. Conservative dating affirms that books such as Joshua and Judges were composed near their events (c. 13th–11th centuries BCE), with final forms possibly compiled under Samuel or later prophetic figures.

The Deuteronomistic History—Joshua through 2 Kings—shows literary and theological unity. Martin Noth proposed a single exilic redactor, but Richard D. Nelson (1981) and Bill T. Arnold

(2014) argue for earlier compilation stages, possibly beginning in Hezekiah or Josiah's reign, with final adjustments post-586 BCE.

Isaiah is attributed to the 8th-century prophet himself, with conservative scholars like E.J. Young defending unified authorship, despite modern scholarship dividing the book into "First," "Second," and "Third" Isaiah. Jeremiah, known for his scribe Baruch, and Ezekiel, a priest in exile, are internally consistent with known historical settings.

The Twelve Minor Prophets span the 9th to 5th centuries BCE. Conservative dating aligns Hosea and Amos to the 8th century, Haggai and Zechariah to the post-exilic period, maintaining prophetic continuity throughout Israel's history.

Writings (Ketuvim)

The Writings include poetic, wisdom, and historical literature: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and others. Conservative scholarship supports Davidic authorship for many Psalms (cf. Ps. 18), and Solomon as principal author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

Books like Ruth and Job reflect early Hebrew language forms and thematic ties to patriarchal religion. Franz Delitzsch (19th century) and later authors like Tremper Longman III argue for an early origin for Job, possibly pre-Mosaic, based on its cultural setting and absence of Israelite institutions.

Daniel is frequently challenged due to its apocalyptic content, but evangelical scholars like Gleason Archer and John Walvoord defend a 6th-century BCE composition, emphasizing linguistic evidence and accurate historical details regarding Babylonian and Persian rulers.

Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are dated to the 5th century BCE, possibly under Ezra's supervision, drawing from temple records. Esther's Persian setting aligns with the reign of Xerxes I (486–465 BCE), with internal knowledge of court practices supporting a conservative dating.

New Testament Writings

Conservative dating places all New Testament writings within the 1st century CE. The Gospels are attributed to apostolic or close eyewitness sources:

- Matthew: written by the apostle Matthew (c. 60–70 CE)
- Mark: based on Peter's preaching, penned by John Mark (c. 50–60 CE)
- Luke: authored by the physician-companion of Paul (c. 60–62 CE)
- John: written by the apostle John, possibly c. 85–95 CE, with firsthand insights

Paul's epistles (Romans through Philemon) are among the earliest Christian documents, dated c. 48–67 CE. Luke-Acts presents an unfinished narrative, likely composed before Paul's martyrdom (c. 64 CE), suggesting early authorship.

The General Epistles (James, Peter, Jude, Hebrews) reflect leadership from Jesus' family and early apostolic figures. Revelation, traditionally dated under Domitian (c. 95 CE), is attributed to John the Apostle, though some propose a pre-70 CE date (e.g., Kenneth Gentry).

Conservatives highlight internal claims of authorship (e.g., "Paul, an apostle...") and consistency with early Christian theology and Greco-Roman historical settings to support these datings. The lack of post-70 events (e.g., Temple destruction) in most NT writings also strengthens early dating arguments.

Conclusion

A conservative framework for biblical authorship affirms that the Bible emerged from historically anchored, theologically coherent sources. While recognizing post-event redactions and scribal activity, this view holds that most texts stem from their named authors or close contemporaries. From Moses to Paul, the Bible reflects continuity in divine revelation and literary formation across centuries of Jewish and Christian experience.

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