

OBJECTIVES: Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Write Luke 24:44 from memory
- Explain why we believe Moses wrote the five books of the Law
- Describe how ancient treaties help us to date the era of Israel’s patriarchs and when the law was written
- Take a Self-Test

KEY VERSE: Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44, CEB).

EVIDENCE FOR MOSES AS THE AUTHOR OF THE LAW: All biblical traditions assert that Moses wrote the Pentateuch (“five books” in Greek). The law of Moses includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Following Ancient Near Eastern practices, Moses rarely named himself as the author. When he did, he described himself in both the first person (“I”) and the third person (“he” and “Moses”). The Apostle Paul wrote, “Moses writes about the righteousness that comes from the Law: ‘The person who does these things will live by them’” (Rom 10:5). That quotation comes from Lev 18:5 (NIV).

Since Moses grew up as a prince in the courts of the pharaoh (Exod 2:10; Acts 7:20–22), he had unique access to Ancient Near Eastern myths. Gen 1–11 alludes to and refutes many of them. In addition, some specific features of early Biblical Hebrew follow the pattern of the Egyptian language from the second millennium BC. For example, only in the Pentateuch does the Hebrew Bible use the same word for “he” and “she.” Scholars have also found early Hebrew inscriptions at Sinai, where Israel camped for at least a year (Exod 19:1–2; Num 9:1–2). This supports Moses as the author, rather than a person from a much later time.

EVIDENCE FOR A SECOND MILLENNIUM BC DATE FOR THE LAW BOOKS: Think about how you write a formal letter. You likely use certain words and a specific order. How you write might look very different from a formal letter written by your grandparents or by your grandchildren. When Israel’s patriarchs made treaties with rulers from other nations, they followed the format which was correct at that time and place.

For example, the accounts of treaties made between the patriarchs and leaders in Gen 21:22–23, 27–33 Gen 26:28–31, and Gen 31:44–54 all use the pattern from 1800–1700 BC in two nearby nations (Columns 1 and 2 on the next page). This allows us to place Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in that time period.

Much of the law of Moses follows the pattern of treaties written from 1400–1200 BC (Columns 4 and 5). Taken together, Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus form one pact. Deuteronomy represents a second agreement between God and Israel.

Table 1: Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Treaty Formats¹

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
Mari and Leilan	Hebrew Patriarchs	Intermediate Hittite	Middle Hittite	Pentateuch*	Sefire and Mesopotamia
<i>Divine Witnesses</i>	<i>Divine witnesses</i>	Title	Title	Title	Title
<i>Oath</i>	<i>Oath</i>	Divine Witnesses	Historical Prologue	Historical Prologue	Divine Witnesses
<i>Stipulations</i>	<i>Stipulations</i>	Stipulations	Stipulations	Stipulations	Curses
			Divine Witnesses		
<i>Ceremony</i>	<i>Ceremony</i>	Oath	Curses	Curses	Stipulations
<i>Curses</i>	<i>Curses</i>	Curses	Blessings	Blessings	
<i>Early</i>	<i>Early</i>	Mid	Late	Late	1st
<i>2nd Mill BC</i>	<i>2nd Mill BC</i>	2nd Mill BC	2nd Mill BC	2nd Mill BC	Mill BC
<i>1800-1700</i>		1600-1400	1400-1200		900-650

* This includes Genesis/Exodus/Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua 24. Since there is no God but Yahweh, there are no divine witnesses

After the two parties approved a treaty, each of them received a copy to place in the temple of their god (Cf. Exod 25:16, 21–22). This affects how we typically think of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1–17). Based upon Ancient Near Eastern practices, each tablet contained all ten commandments. Moses placed God’s copy and Israel’s in the same place: the ark of the covenant (Deut 10:1–5). Why do you think he did that? *All answers are at the bottom of that page.*²

The Ten Commandments was likely the first written biblical passage, which God himself wrote (Exod 20:2–17; Exod 31:18). Moses incorporated this treaty into the book of the covenant (Exod 20:22–23:33), which was written just prior to Israel agreeing to keep it (Exod 24:4–11). The next section of Exodus describes the requirements for building the tabernacle, making its furnishings, and preparing clothing for the priests (Exod 25:1–31:18). Making those items took about a year.

During the year that the Israelites remained in Sinai, Moses likely wrote the book of Genesis and the account of their escape from Egypt in the first half of Exodus. In fact, Exod 1:1–8 assumes its readers recognize Jacob and Joseph. After generations of slavery, Israelites needed to understand their history as God’s people. Genesis gives the historical background to the covenant God made with them. It says, “This is what I have done for you as a people, so you must obey the terms of my covenant with you.”

¹ Adapted from Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 285, 288, and 324 and with permission from Gordon P. Hugenberger [“Introduction to the Pentateuch (Continued): Authorship of the Pentateuch” (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, 2006).

² Both had the same God.

Its place in Genesis through Leviticus follows the format of treaties between a Hittite emperor and the minor kings serving under him during 1400–1200 BC (Columns 4 and 5). Some experts argue that the exodus occurred in 1440 BC while others say it happened in 1290 BC. Based upon the treaty patterns in Columns 3, 4, and 5, which do you think is correct?³

One theory says that someone wrote Deuteronomy in the seventh century BC, just before a priest claimed that workers found it while repairing the temple (2 Kgs 22:3–23:3). How do Columns 5 and 6 in the chart show us that idea is incorrect?⁴

The records of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—whose treaties with other rulers follow the pattern of 1800–1700 BC—would have been passed down to the firstborn son. Shortly before Jacob died, he gave the rights of the firstborn son to Joseph (Gen 49:1–4, 22–26). Joseph’s duties in Egypt indicate that he could read and write (Gen 39:4; Gen 41:46–49). He appears to have added his life history to those family records. This explains why the story of Joseph’s life accounts for one-third of Genesis (Gen 37, 38–50). Moses seems to have had access to not only Joseph’s bones but also to those records of his ancestors (Exod 13:19).

³ We know the date for Column 3 is between 1600 BC and 1400 BC. It does not match the pattern Moses used in Column 5. However, Column 5 does match the pattern from 1400–1200 BC in Column 4.

⁴ Column 6 has the pattern used during the seventh century BC. It does not match the pattern from 1400–1200 BC in Column 4.

SELF TEST:

1. Write Luke 24:44 from memory.

2. What evidence do we have that Moses wrote Genesis? Name at least two things.

3. Why can we say that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived close to 1800–1700 BC?

4. Why can we say that Moses lived sometime between 1400–1200 BC?

ANSWERS TO SELF TEST:

1. [Jesus] said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44).

2. The Bible mentions only Moses as the author. For example, Paul quoted Leviticus and said Moses wrote it.

It was normal for ANE authors not to name themselves. Instead, they wrote things like, “Moses said” or “he said.”

Moses was raised in the pharaoh’s courts where he learned ANE myths.

The Hebrew language in Genesis has only one word for “he” and “she,” just like in the Egyptian language from when Moses lived.

People have found other early Hebrew language carvings where the Bible says that Israel camped for one year.

3. The agreements that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob made with government officials followed the pattern of agreements made during 1800–1700 BC.

4. Taken together, Exodus and Leviticus follow the treaty pattern of 1400–1200 BC. The book of Deuteronomy also does.