

## Development of the Documentary Hypothesis

### Stage 1: Antiquity: First Suspicions

Even the ancient Rabbis debated whether or not Moses could have possibly written the last chapter of Deuteronomy, which details Moses's death! So the Rabbis developed a theory: Some said Joshua, Moses's right-hand man and successor wrote it after Moses died. Others said that God dictated all 5 books to Moses and that when Moses got to this part, he kept writing but was crying as he wrote the chapter about his death.

Similarly, Porphyry, a third century A.D. Neoplatonist philosopher, had his doubts about the authorship of the book of Daniel. Even though the book of Daniel is a different book of the Bible than those we are studying, it's worth quoting Porphyry's views just to show that even in antiquity, people were beginning to theorize about the biblical text in new ways.

The early Christian writer Jerome reports of Porphyry: "Porphyry wrote his twelfth book against the prophecy of Daniel, denying that it was composed by the person to whom it is ascribed in its title, but rather by some individual living in Judea at the time of Antioch us...; he further alleged that 'Daniel' did not foretell the future so much as he related the past." Porphyry's views probably seemed like heresy at the time. Though even a close comparison between Daniel and the Books of Maccabees should have caused a few to notice that the book of Daniel probably was written to look like it came from the time of the Babylonian Exile (centuries earlier) just so the writer could get away with criticizing the Seleucid conquerors of his own time! But that's another story.

Suffice it to say that even in antiquity, people were offering various theories to account for the origins of what has come down to us as Scripture.

### Stage 2: Middle Ages and Renaissance

A number of scholars during the Middle Ages brought up questions here and there about various lines and passages in the biblical text that seemed odd or out of place:

- *Isaac ibn Yashush*: An 11th century Jewish court physician in Muslim Spain. He observed that Genesis 36 appeared to be a list of Edomite kings who would have lived long after Moses was dead. Why was this list in Genesis?
- *Abraham ibn Ezra*: A 12th century Spanish Rabbi noted several passages that he thought Moses couldn't have been responsible for. *Bonfils*: A 14th century scholar located in Damascus. Affirmed ibn Ezra's determinations.
- *Tostatus*: A 15th century bishop of Avila. Affirmed that the passage about Moses's death and others could not have been penned by Moses.

### Stage 3: Reformation Period: Editors at Work

*Carlstadt*: A 16th century scholar. Argued that the final chapter of Deuteronomy on Moses's death was not written in the same style as the rest of the book of Deuteronomy. *Andreas Van Maes*: Flemish Catholic scholar, posited that editors had worked over and expanded the Moses material. *Benedict Pereira*: Jesuit scholar posited that editors had worked over and expanded the Moses material. *Jacques Bonfrere*: Jesuit scholar posited that editors had worked over and expanded the Moses material.

### Stage 4: Early Modern Period: No More Moses

- *Thomas Hobbes*: A 17th century British Philosopher argued that the use of the phrase such and such is the case "to this day" indicated that the text was written long after Moses.
- *Isaac de la Peyere*: French Calvinist. Argued that the phrase 'across the Jordan,' which is the way a person living inside Israel talks about the territory of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, shows that whoever wrote the story must have been residing in Israel and couldn't have been Moses who died in Moab!
- *Benedict Spinoza*: A 17th century Jewish scholar in Holland, argued from many problematic passages that Ezra, not Moses, was the writer of the Torah.
- *Richard Simon*: A 17th century French Catholic scholar, argued that various "prophets" and "scribal schools" had made additions to a Torah that owed its start to Moses. *John Hampden*: A 17th century English scholar, who affirmed Richard Simon's views.

### Stage 5: Doublets, Strands, God Names

*H. B. Witter*: German minister. In 1711 had begun to sort out the problem of stories that repeat, but his findings were lost until 1924.

*Jean Astruc*: French professor of medicine and court physician of Louis XV. Alert to the differences in the uses of the names for God in the Torah, Elohim and Jehovah, Astruc suggested that Moses wrote Genesis and Exodus in 4 columns, 2 of which were distinguished by using different names for God. Later scribes mixed up the columns to produce the Bible we now have. Astruc makes the real breakthrough which others follow.

*J. G. Eichhorn*: German professor. Followed Astruc's lead, but suggested that the sources were put together after Moses had died.

### Stage 6: 19th Cent: Sources Put in a Timeframe

*W. M. L. de Wette*: Argued that Deuteronomy was a separate source that should be connected with the reforms of King Josiah in the late 7th century B.C. and not put centuries earlier as if from Moses.

*W. Vatke*: Argued that the P source was after Deuteronomy and thus dated from the period of the Exile. Vatke had seen three stages of religious development: J and E were a fertility stage; D was an ethical stage; and P

was a priestly stage. *E. Reuss*: Further developed Vatke's views.

*K.H. Oral*: Student of Reuss who argued that the four sources come from basically three different time periods: J and E were the earliest; D was later as de Wette had said; and P was still later as Vatke had said.

*J. Wellhausen*: Usually the Documentary Hypothesis is credited to Wellhausen, who really just gave it the most elaborate expression. He argued that the combination came in stages: J and E were joined first, making JE; later Deuteronomy was joined to JE; and still later the Priestly material was added. Essentially Wellhausen combined Vatke's stages of religious development with Graf's timing of the development.

### **Stage 7: 20th Century: More Questions**

*M. Noth*: A major turn took place in the 1940s when this German scholar argued that Deuteronomy really was the introduction to a whole history of Israel that ran from Deuteronomy, through Joshua and Judges, down to 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, that is from the time of Moses to the destruction of the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians (the Exile). Scholars had been so preoccupied with the books of Moses that they failed to sort out the connection with other books!

*Critics*: The theory has never been without its critics. Some have been more conservative and view any sort of theorizing about the origins of the Bible to be destructive of religion as a whole.'

Others are more sophisticated, like M. H. Segal and U. Cassuto, Jewish scholars who argue that differences in the names for God just show a difference in emphasis: Elohim is used for the general world and YHWH is used for God's relation with Israel. Some, such as K. A. Kitchen, use the results of archaeology to argue that in all ancient myths there is repetition of whole sections of a story and one shouldn't make too much of repetition in the Bible. Still others will argue that the theory is just too speculative to be assured. They would agree that something is funny about the composition of the Torah, but accounting for it is just too difficult. But such suggestions are theories too and one must wonder if they really account for all the evidence as well as the Documentary Hypothesis.

*Developments*: Of greater importance, perhaps, is the discussion among scholars about the relative dates of the sources. The old effort to put P late sounds like a Protestant bias against Catholic ritual. Recently Jewish scholars such as J. Milgrom have argued that the P source finds a home in the ritual life of Israel's monarchy and thus should be dated earlier. Some have begun to question whether J or E should be seen as "primitive" and hence old. Such mythic materials as J's story in Genesis 2-4 could just as easily come from the Exile, where the Babylonians themselves were still using and producing tales like the Babylonian Creation Story.

### **Additional Comments**

Starting with Spinoza in the 17th cent, and flourishing with German scholarship in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, analysis grew to the point where, as Speiser says in his introduction to the Anchor Bible *Genesis*, "the conclusion which virtually all modern scholars are willing to accept, is that the Pentateuch was in reality a composite work, the product of many hands and periods". As with any theory, its acceptance rests on its ability to explain various problems and discrepancies in the text. Although today many points remain in dispute within this school of thought, those disputes are about which source is responsible for a given passage and what were the influences on that source, and are not about whether or not there were different sources or what were the principal characteristics and concerns of each source.

As a gross oversimplification of that perspective, analysis of the Torah reveals four separate strands or sources, each with its own vocabulary, its own approach and concerns. Those four sources are:

- The "J" source, from "Jahweh," the German Christian rendering of Yod-He-Vav-He, the word for God used almost exclusively by that source, and which generally presents humans in various situations in which their actions and words convey the meaning.
- The "E" source, for "Elohim," the word for God most commonly used in that source, in which the focus is on events more than on the individuals involved.
- The "P" source, for "Priestly," which focuses on the formal relations between God and society, including the genealogies which document the chain of transmission of God's message and authority from Creation to Moses. "P" uses both Elohim and El Shaddai.
- The "D" or "Dtr" source, for the Deuteronomist, source of the book of Deuteronomy and likely in addition the books of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel and I and II Kings. Generally speaking, the Deuteronomist emphasizes centralization of worship and governance in Jerusalem.

The documentary hypothesis also uses the shorthand "R" for the Redactor or editor who brought together the J, E, P and Dtr material into a single set of writings we know as the Torah.

It should be noted that the use of each of these alphabetical shorthand letters does not necessarily imply that there was a single individual who wrote all of any given strand of material but rather there was a like-minded group that existed over time with shared perspectives and traditions.

The abandonment of Mosaic authorship does not require a denial of divine content in the Torah. It is not difficult to believe that the sources were divinely inspired, notwithstanding that they often had other agendas as well.