

## The Documentary Hypothesis Summarized

The documentary hypothesis proposes that the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) was derived from originally independent narratives which were subsequently combined into the current form by a series of redactors (editors). By the end of the 19th century, it was generally agreed there were four main sources, combined into their final form by a series of redactors, R:

- the Yahwist source (J) : written c. 950 BCE in the southern Kingdom of Judah;
- the Elohist source (E) : written c. 850 BCE in the northern Kingdom of Israel;
- the Deuteronomist (D) : written c. 630 BCE in Jerusalem during a period of religious reform; and

- the Priestly source (P) : written c. 550 BCE by Kohanim (Jewish priests) in exile in Babylon.

Not all of the Torah was traced to these four sources: numerous smaller sections were identified, such as the Holiness Code contained in Leviticus 17-26.

J: the Jahwist source.

Scholars estimate the date of composition as c. 950 BCE, not long before the split of the united Kingdom of Israel into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah in 922 BC, making it the oldest source.

The documentary hypothesis attributes anthropomorphic descriptions of Yahweh, personal visits from Yahweh, and use of the personal name prior to Exodus 3 to the Jahwist source.

Concerned with narratives, making up half of Genesis and half of Exodus, plus fragments of Numbers, the Jahwist presents a theology of history, rather than philosophical theology. Yahweh's character is known by his actions. The Jahwist picture of Yahweh begins with the creation of human beings and the early history of mankind in general (Genesis 2-11). The Jahwist contributions in this material do not intend to present an exhaustive history, but rather certain episodes with particular importance to later generations. These episodes are etiological; they explain human mortality, the need to work for a living, the existence of many languages, rivalry among brothers, and man's attempt to break through God's limits. The family is often in view in theological contexts, and the sequence of sin-punishment-mercy appears several times.

## E: the Elohist source.

The Elohist uses the generic word for deity, Elohim, rather than the more personal name, YHWH, prior to Exodus 3, and describes Yahweh with a more impersonal nature (for example, speaking through dreams, prophets, and angels rather than personal appearances). The Elohist's narrative begins with the divine address to Abraham, the ancestor of Israel. E makes up a third of Genesis and half of Exodus, plus fragments of Numbers. E describes a human-like God initially called Elohim, and Yahweh subsequent to the incident of the burning bush, at which Elohim reveals himself as Yahweh. E focuses on the Kingdom of Israel and on the Shiloh priesthood, and has a moderately eloquent style. Scholars suggest the Elohist source was composed c. 850 BCE. Prophetic leadership is emphasized by building the narrative on four key ancestors (Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses) who are presented as prophets who receive revelations from God in visions and dreams.

## D: the Deuteronomist

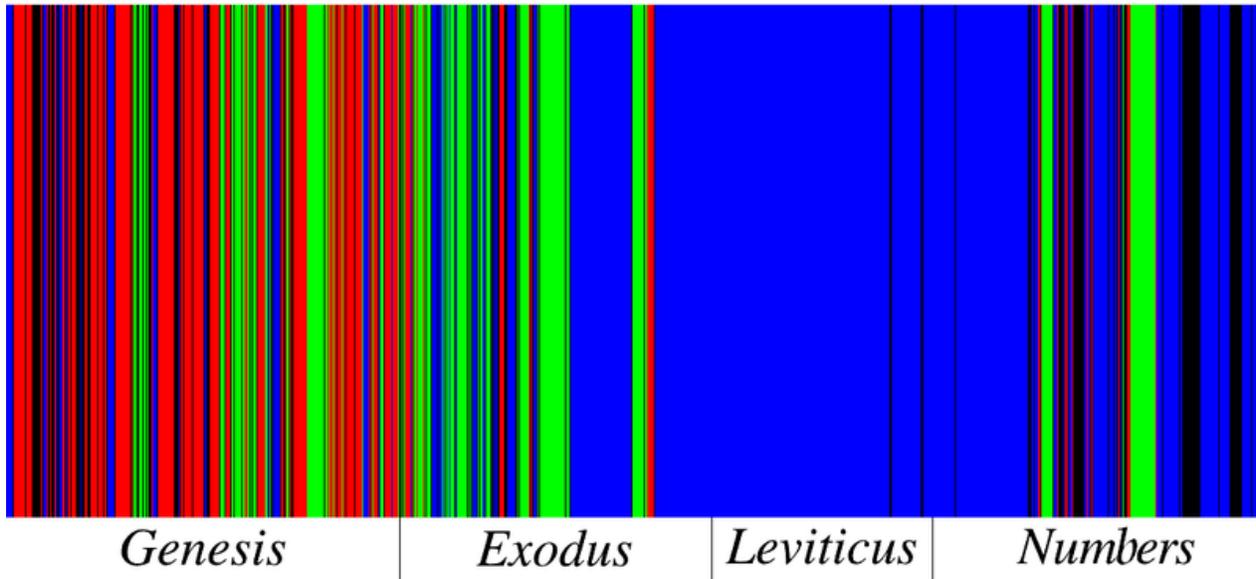
D in the Torah is restricted to the book of Deuteronomy, although it continues into the subsequent books of Joshua, Judges and Kings. It takes the form of a series of sermons about the Law, as well as recapitulating the narrative of Exodus and Numbers. Its distinctive term for God is YHWH Eloheinu, traditionally translated in English as "The Lord our God." Scholars estimate this source may have been composed c. 650–621 BCE.

## P: the Priestly source.

The Priestly source portrays God/Yahweh as the creator of the whole world, which he declared to be good, and on which he has bestowed his blessing. Humanity is created in God's image (or as God's image) implying dominion over the whole earth. P includes many lists (especially genealogies), dates, numbers and laws. Portrayals of God viewed as distant and unmerciful are ascribed to P. P partly duplicates J and E, but alters details to stress the importance of the priesthood. P consists of about a fifth of Genesis (including its famous first chapter), substantial portions of Exodus and Numbers, and almost all of Leviticus. Scholars are divided on the likely time of its composition, c. 600–400 BCE.

## A Graphical Representation.

*Yahwist (J)* ■ ■ *Priestly (P)*  
*Elohist (E)* ■ ■ *Redactor (R)*



## A Semi-Useful Chart.

<b>J</b> <b>Jahwist</b>	<b>E</b> <b>Elohist</b>	<b>P</b> <b>Priestly</b>	<b>D</b> <b>Deuteronomist</b>
stress on Judah	stress on northern Israel	stress on Judah	stress on central shrine
stresses leaders	stresses the prophetic	stresses the cultic	stresses fidelity to Jerusalem
anthropomorphic speech about God	refined speech about God	majestic speech about God	speech recalling God's work
God walks and talks with us	God speaks in dreams	cultic approach to God	moralistic approach
God is YHWH	God is Elohim (till Ex 3)	God is Elohim (till Ex 3)	God is YHWH
uses "Sinai"	Sinai is "Horeb"	has genealogies and lists	has long sermons

## One Scholar's View.

Richard Elliott Friedman's *Who Wrote the Bible?* (1987) and *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (2003) explains, in terms based on the history of ancient Israel, how the redactors could have tolerated inconsistency, contradiction and repetition, indeed had it forced upon them by the historical setting in which they worked. Friedman argued that J appeared a little before 722 BCE, followed by E, with a combined JE soon after that. P was written as a rebuttal of JE (c. 715–687 BCE), and D was the last to appear, at the time of Josiah (c. 622 BCE), before the Redactor, whom Friedman identifies as Ezra, collated the final Torah.