



Documentary Hypothesis

By

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The Documentary Source Theory states the belief that the first five books of the Bible (Pentateuch, Torah) were not written by Moses, but rather, four independent authors and a redactor. Until the nineteenth century, most Christian and Jewish scholars traditionally believed that only Moses was the author, however, Jerome, the Gnostics, and Abraham ibn-Ezra began questioning his authorship. It grew more and more difficult for them to attribute the writings in the Pentateuch to Moses, because Scripture described his own death (Deu 34:1-8), as well as list Edomite kings (Gen 36) who lived long after the death of Moses. This led to pseudo-Jewish Philosopher Baruch Spinoza, who rejected Judaism and was rejected by the Amsterdam Jewish community, raising serious doubts about direct Mosaic authorship. French physician, Jean Astruc, advanced the theory further by identifying the two-document theory, which was ordered by Wellhausen. This theory development eventually led to the supposed identity of four different sources as contributors to the Book of Genesis, which eventually was ordered further into personalities, combinations and time considerations by other Bible scholars.

Spinoza, Astruc, and Eichhorn

Rationalist Baruch Spinoza developed a "higher criticism" of the Bible to analyze its contents internally, rather than through the text, which is tagged "lower criticism". This led to Jean Astruc discovering a difference in the use of the LORD God's title within the Genesis writings in 1753. He isolated what he believed to be evidence to two different authors, one which used the divine name "Elohim" and the other using the most holy name of "YHWH".

This two-document theory was expanded to four-document theory when German scholar J. G. Eichhorn, added style and content to the divine names of the LORD God in his analysis, and included the entire Pentateuch in his evaluation. While Spinoza and Astruc were key players in the development of the higher criticism of documentary theory, it is Eichhorn who is designated by many to be the "father of higher criticism."

Astruc adapted tools for biblical source criticism which included a focus on "doublets," which searched for duplications of accounts in two places. Some of these doublets that were identified included two different accounts of creation, covenant between God and Abraham, naming of Abraham's son Isaac, Abraham claiming Sarah as sister, Jacob making a journey to Mesopotamia, revelation Jacob at Beth-El, the LORD God's changing Jacob's name to Israel, and two stories of Moses getting water from a rock at a place called Meribah.

This focused separation resulted in four columns of text, with two long narratives and two short ones. Astruc believed these four accounts were used by Moses to write Genesis, and that these accounts were to be read separately; it was in the hands of a later editor that all four columns were placed into a single narrative. In 1823, Astruc concluded that Moses did not have any part in authoring the Pentateuch, but was merely a collector of different writings that he put together.

Wellhausen

Julius Wellhausen published "Die Composition des Hexateuch" in 1876. The four-source hypothesis for Hexateuch origins (which included the book of Joshua) was formerly established. In 1878, Wellhausen traced the development of the natural life development of religion of the ancient Israelites in a secular light in his book "Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels." Wellhausen added very little new scholarship to the Documentary Theory. However, these two books ordered the theory in a way that stirred scholarly debate on the subject for the next hundred years. As a result, the Documentary Theory is often miscalled the "Wellhausen (or Graf-Wellhausen) Hypothesis." The traditionally accepted Pentateuchal sources hypothetically identified by this ordering include: J - Jahwist (Jehovah), E - Elohist (Elohim), D - Deuteronomist, and P - Priestly; while even more sources have been suggested, such as R- Redactor, S- Seir Edom, L - Lay, and K- Kenite, these extra views are not accepted generally by the Documentary Theorists.

Primary Documentary Sources

Jahwist (J)

The Jahwist Pentateuchal source was probably composed in the south, in the court of David or Solomon, during the 10th century. The epic accounts can be viewed as national feats of a Davidic Empire which is given by YAHWEH to Abraham and his descendants. The author fervently relates the deeds of Israel's ancestors, but yet presents them with flawed record as necessary for accurate reflection of character. YAHWEH is presented both as a High God and One with human form as he

strolls in the garden, seals the door of the ark, visits with Abraham, and spies the sinful of Sodom and Gomorrah. He is presented as both transcendent and personal God to the Tribes of Israel in the land of Judah.

Elohist (E)

The Elohist epic might have been composed in northern Israel, after the split of the empire, in the early part of the 9th century. It uses the name "Elohim" to refer to God, prior to the revelation of the Divine Name given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. God is less available for the Elohist, and does not communicate directly with humans; rather, God speaks to men through dream, visions, rituals and divine messengers.

The Elohist draws moral conclusions and admonishes readers with a preachy attitude. It glosses over moral imperfections; for instance Sarah was Abraham's half-sister, thus he did not lie; Jacob was blest by God, thus he did not really steal from Laban.

The Elohist is very fragmented in its present-day form and merely supplements the narrative of the Jahwist epic. Many scholars question the existence of an independent Elohist epic, and suggest that it is composed of unrelated supplements to J.

Deuteronomist (D)

Some think the Deuteronomist was possibly using pre-Exilic material, but writing in the age of Babylonian exile in the mid-sixth century BCE. Others think that it was a group of Temple scholars that corroborated together to produce

this text, as well as contribute to the book of Joshua.

Some believe this author's writings reflect the human intellect that develops over time to absorb the things of God. The narrative records "recollections of Moses" and starts with the Ten Commandments. Though similar to the literary style of Priestly edition, it is scattered and disordered in its recall of the accounts, and avoids any complications that conflict with the laws of God.

Priestly (P)

The Priestly edition of the Tetrareuch (Genesis - Numbers) was probably composed during the exile or shortly after (550-450 BCE). The writer uses glorious words that focus upon the life and government of the people as a unique community belonging to YAHWEH. The name of the LORD God is varied within the Priestly writings. While Elohim is used to refer to Him before the revelation of the Divine Name revealed to Moses, also archaic names are used; these include El-Shaddai, El-Olam, El-Berith, El-Bethel, El-Ro'I, El the god of the fathers, the kinsman of Isaac, and the bull of Jacob.

Evidences that Argue Against Documentary Theory

While it is not possible for Moses to have written the entire Pentateuch, as his own death is recorded in Deuteronomy 34:1-8, it still is probable that Moses authored a large portion of it. The amount of material added by inspired scribes seems to be limited.

The external evidences pointing to Moses as the author are reliable. Not only do the Samaritan Pentateuch, Palestinian Talmud and Babylon

Talmud testify to this author, but testimony also exists in the writings of Philo (Life of Moses, 3:39), Josephus (Antiquities, 4:8:45) and the Apocrypha - (Ecclus. 45:5; II Macc. 7:30)

Most compelling however, are the numerous reports in the Word of God providing evidence of Moses' writings contained within the Pentateuch.

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this [for] a memorial in a book, and rehearse [it] in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." (Exodus 17:14)

"And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel." (Exodus 24:4 KJV)

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel." (Exodus 34:27 KJV)

"These [are] the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD: and these [are] their journeys according to their goings out." (Numbers 33:1-2 KJV)

"And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel." (Deuteronomy 31:9 KJV)

"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses

my servant commanded thee: turn not from it [to] the right hand or [to] the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." (Joshua 1:7-8 KJV)

"And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I [am] the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" (Mark 12:26 KJV)

The author of the Pentateuch is familiar with the desert environment that is navigated by the God's people. He was familiar with Egypt and Egyptian names, and uses the common name rather than the formal identity in many Egyptian terms. He also was extremely accurate in his detailed references to both geography and habits of the Egyptian people. Also, the form of language used in literary expression dates to the second millennium distinctly in style. The archaisms also date the Pentateuch's writings to the second millennium.

Since "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22), it is not unreasonable to assume that he had the intellectual capacity and training to be the primary author of Genesis. Therefore, while it is highly probable that although small portions were written later, Genesis was essentially written by Moses himself or a scribe under his immediate control, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16).

The external evidence is powerful testimony to the author of both Genesis and the Pentateuch. The Word of God shows Moses as the writer of the things revealed to him by the LORD God. You just can't find better evidence than the Truth bearing witness to Truth!

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this [for] a memorial in a book, and rehearse [it] in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." (Exodus 17:14 KJV)

In the balanced laws of America, there are no stronger evidences than that of testimonial evidence in writing. Unlike any other evidence type, written testimonial evidence can convict a man and declare guilty his crimes.

The Word of God goes even farther than the laws of judgment that mankind uses to judge each other. The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Considering Exodus 17:14, as just one of numerous external proofs within Scripture, makes a convincing and powerful argument that Moses was the writer and recorder of the things that God revealed through him. The burden

of proof is upon the document theorists, and they have not proven their position satisfactorily. In fact, to prove their theory of multiple authors by rejecting the evidence contained within the Word, threatens to muddy Scripture by changing the balance of His Word; their attempts would surely reflect false teachings at that point, and give solid reason to reject the document theorist defense.

About the Author: Kathy L. McFarland is a Becker Bible Studies Teacher and Author of Guided Bible Studies for Hungry Christians. She has received her Bachelor of Science degree in Religious Studies from Liberty University, and is currently seeking her Master of Divinity (Professional Ministries Track) degree from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary & Graduate School. Kathy is also a Hebrew language student attending an Israeli taught Ulpan and a noted expert on Old Testament exegesis, Christian apologetics, and Bible typology and mysteries.