

Did Moses Write the Torah?

Examining the JEDP Theory

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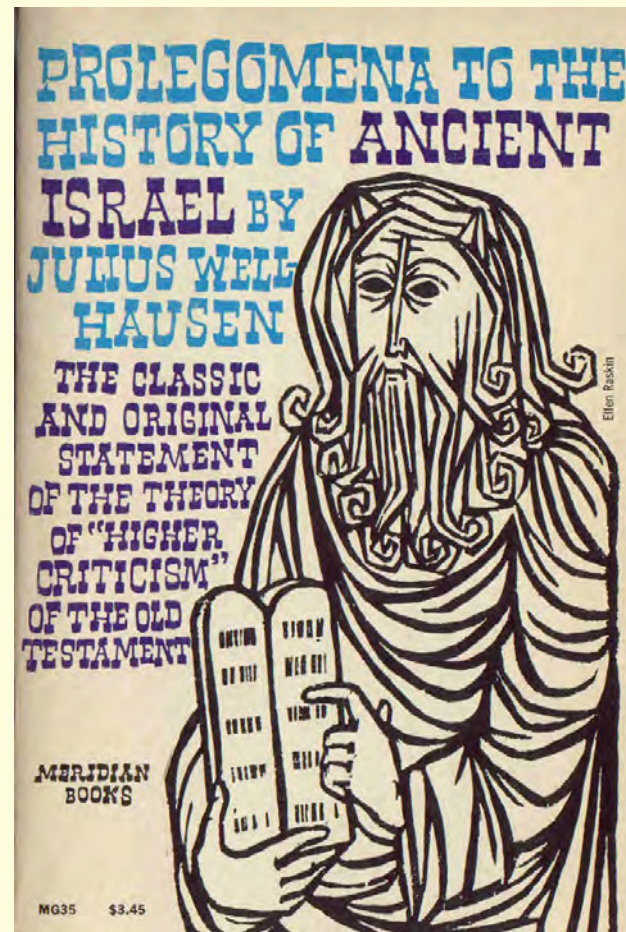


What is the JEDP Theory?

- Proposed by Julius Wellhausen in 1878.
- Has dominated liberal OT studies ever since.
- The Torah (Genesis thru Deuteronomy) was not written by Moses about 1400 BC.
- Instead, authors J, E, D, P wrote 850-550 BC. Their documents were assembled by editors over several centuries.

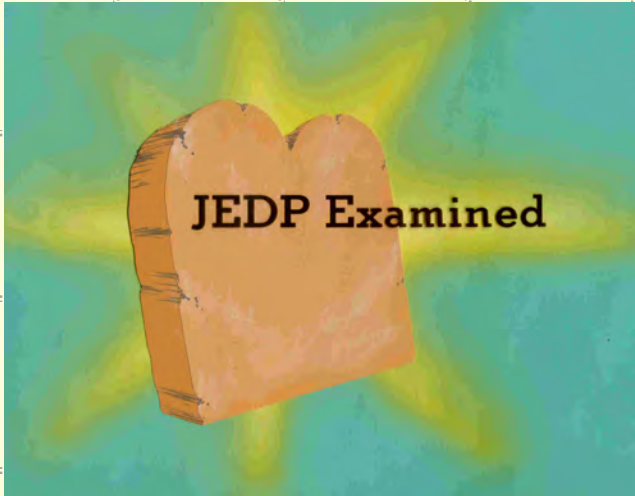


Wellhausen's Book



The Documents Described

- J a southern work, written ~ 850 BC
 - Flowing narrative style, uses "Yahweh"
- E a northern work, written ~ 750 BC
 - Flowing narrative style, used "Elohim"
- D about time of Josiah, ~ 650 BC
 - Rhetorical style
- P a priestly work, ~ 550 BC
 - Dry, repetitive style, many details



Historical Background

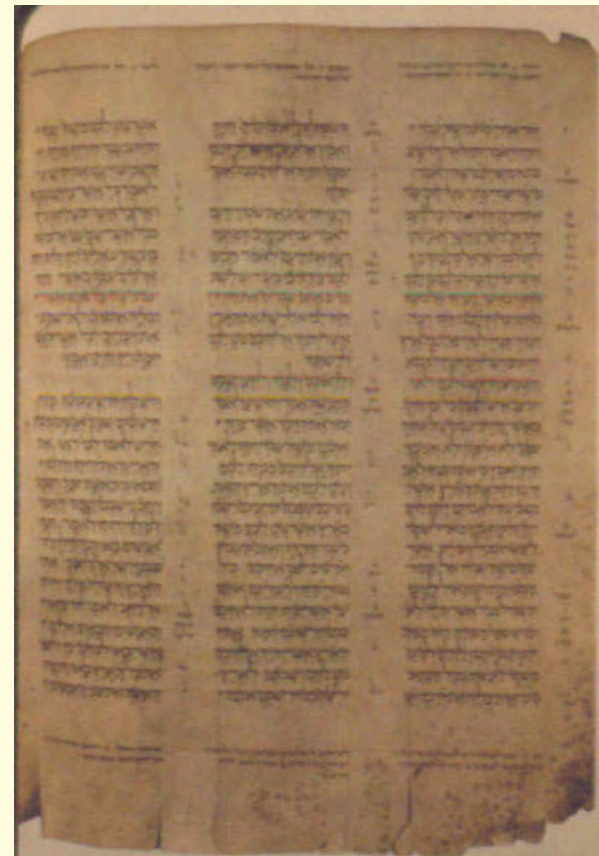
The Context of the JEDP Theory

Manuscript Evidence

We have hundreds of manuscript copies of the first five books of the Bible, all of which present them in the form in which we have them today. Not even one ancient copy of J, E, D, or P as a separate and continuous unit has ever been found.

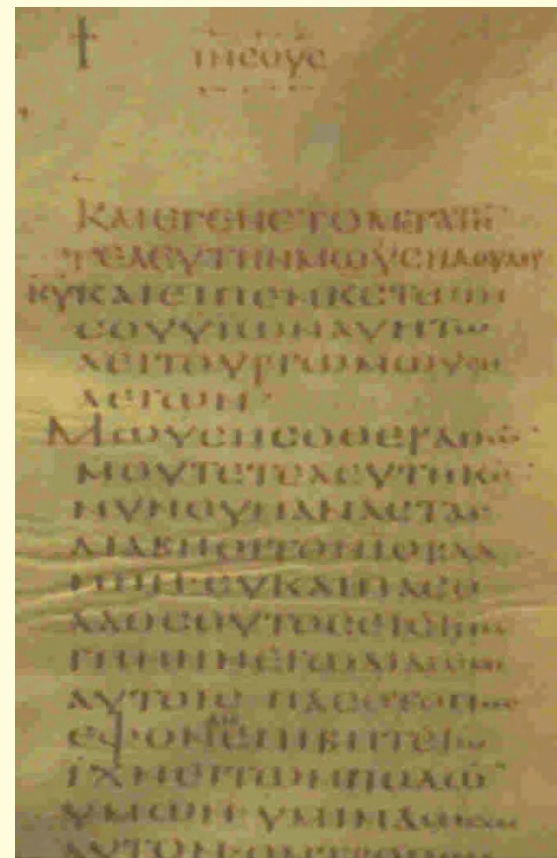
Traditional Hebrew Texts

- We have hundreds of manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible from the centuries before printing.
- We have no manuscripts of J, E, D, or P.
- This is a Hebrew Bible manuscript from the 9th century of our era.



Ancient Translations

- The Hebrew Bible was translated into Aramaic, Greek, and Latin around the time of Jesus.
- None of these contain separate texts of J, E, D or P.
- This is a Greek ms from the 5th century.



Dead Sea Scrolls

- Since the mid-20th century, we have found much earlier mss of the Bible than were previously known.
- None of these contain J, E, D or P as separate works.
- This is a ms from the Dead Sea community dating from the 2nd century **before** our era.



Other Historical Evidence

No record that has come down to us from ancient times contains any mention of such documents as having ever existed. There is no ancient reference to the writing of any such document, nor to such a process of combining documents as the theory assumes. There is no evidence that any such process actually occurred.

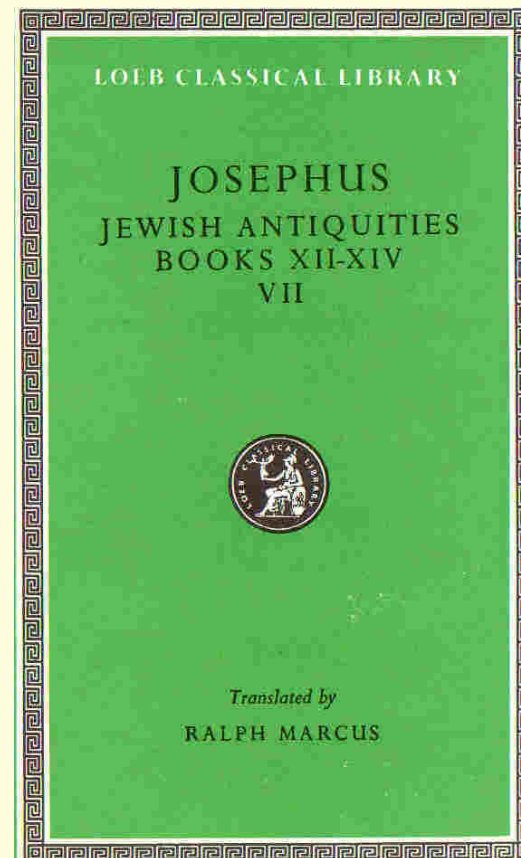
Rabbinic Literature

- We have extensive writings from the rabbis from ~200 AD onward thru the medieval period.
- None of these works refer to such documents as J, E, D or P.
- This is a sample page from the Babylonian Talmud, composed about 550 AD.



Jewish Historians

- We have several significant historical writers from the time of Jesus, and briefer materials from earlier.
- None of these make reference to works such as J, E, D or P.
- This is Josephus' *Antiquities*, the most extensive of such works, from ~ 100 AD.



Jewish Inscriptions

- We have Hebrew inscriptions dating back as far as the 10th century BC.
- None of these allude to such documents as J, E, D, P either.
- This is the Gezer calendar, from the 10th century BC.



Summary on Historical Evidence

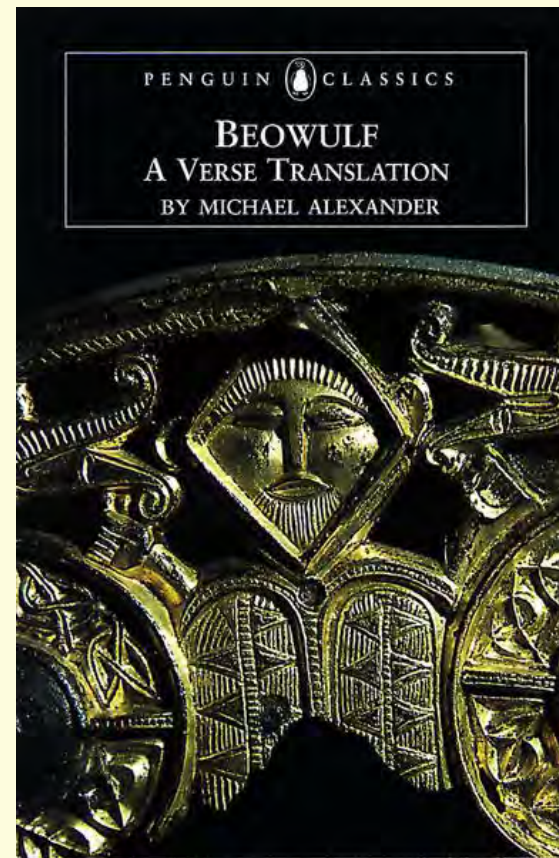
- Thus no documents resembling nor referring to J, E, D, P have come down to us from antiquity.
- Thus, the burden of proof for the existence of such documents lies with those who would propound the theory, not with its opponents.

Literary Method

The JEDP theory is nearly the only survivor of a 19th century literary practice that has been discarded outside the field of Biblical criticism. A century ago it was common to theorize multiple authors and sources for almost any ancient or medieval document. Most such theories have today been abandoned, and are viewed as merely curiosities. It is only in the field of Biblical study that this 19th century attitude has been retained.

Beowulf

- An Anglo-Saxon epic poem, the oldest such in the history of English literature (~ AD 700)
- Adventures of the Danish hero Beowulf fighting various monsters
- Once thought to have been composed of 6 sources, now seen as a unified composition



The Niebelungenlied

- German saga from ~1200 AD, of treasure, murder & revenge
- Some of the material was used by Wagner in his *Ring* operas.
- Karl Lachmann thought it was originally 20 independent songs.
- Now seen as the work of a single author



Piers the Plowman

- A 14th cen poem, a series of allegorical dreams, exalting simplicity & truth, satirizing the clergy
- Once thought to be the work of five authors, now seen as the work of one.



William Langland wrote about the life of a typical peasant in fourteenth century England in his poem, *Piers Plowman*. In this excerpt, Piers bemoans his miserable diet and dreams of the marvelous meals he will have at harvest time.

Literary Method Today

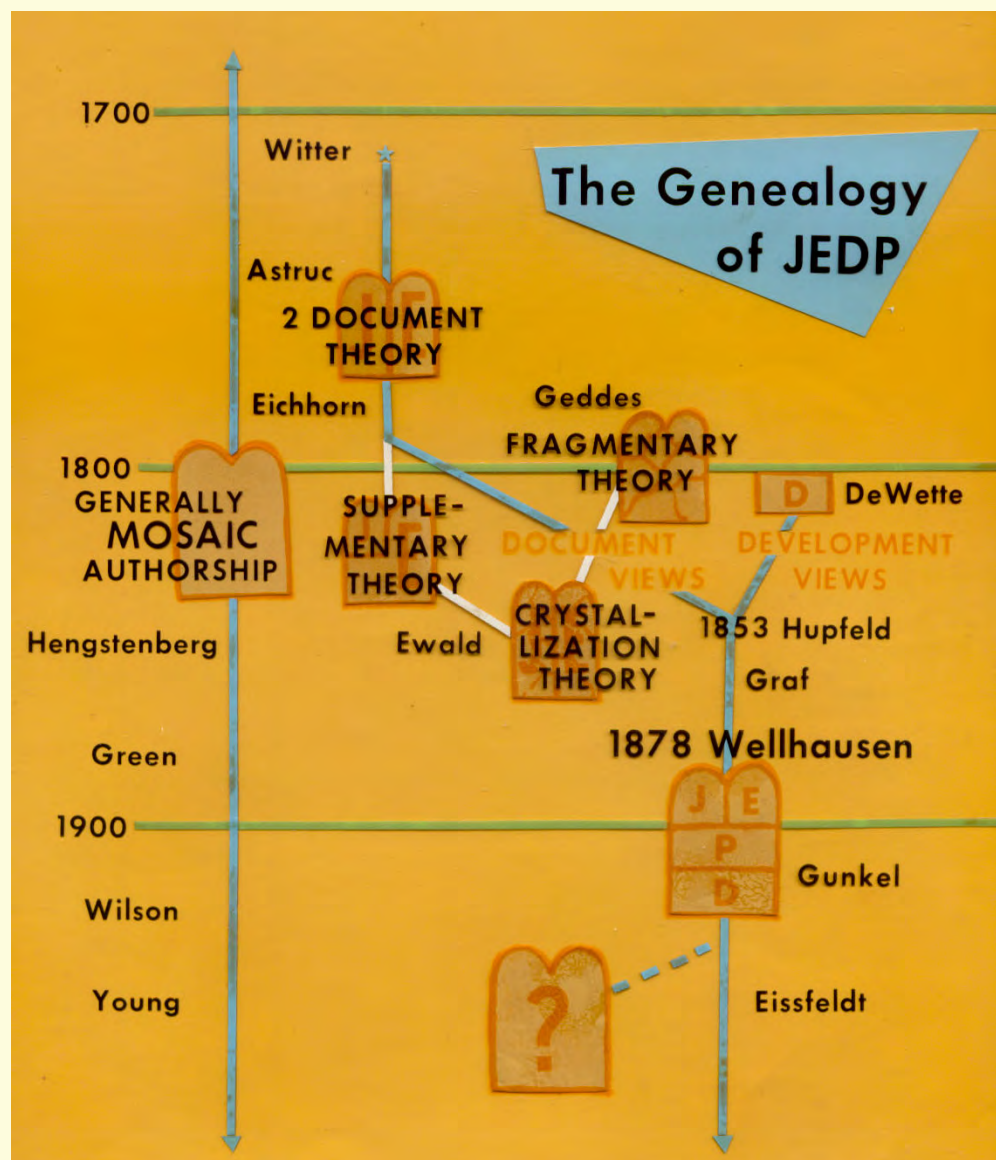
"In field after field, theories of composite authorship, earlier versions, different strata, have been discarded. The kind of analysis which was once thought to have been the particular duty of literary criticism is now markedly out of fashion. The assumption today is more and more in favour of single authorship, unless there is clear external evidence to the contrary." – Helen Gardner, *The Business of Criticism* (Oxford, 1959), p 97.

Other Source Theories

During the 19th century various German scholars presented widely differing theories regarding the origins of the first five books of the Bible. None of these theories gained complete ascendancy until 1878, when a particular theory — strikingly different from most of the views previously held — was advanced by Julius Wellhausen. Though more than a century has passed during which no new evidence for the theory has been discovered, it is still being taught today in almost the identical form in which Wellhausen presented it.

Predecessors to the JEDP Theory

- Two-Document Theory
- Fragmentary Theory
- Supplementary Theory
- Crystallization Theory
- Development Theories
- Modified (3-Document) Theory



Various Views on the Origin of Genesis thru Deuteronomy

Two-Document Theory

- Though noticed by Witter, it was Jean Astruc in 1753 who suggested that the two names for God pointed to two sources used by Moses.
- Johann G. Eichhorn modified this in 1780, rejecting Moses as author & dating the sources later.
- Eichhorn saw two distinct documents, J and E, with 2 names of God and 2 styles.



Two-Document Theory

- One document, J, used "Yahweh" (Jehovah) for God's name, and had a flowing, narrative style.
- The other document, E, used "Elohim" for God, and had a very dry, statistical, detailed style.



Fragmentary Theory

- Karl Ilgen (1798) proposed dividing the two. He came up with 17 documents and at least three authors.
- Later suggestions by Alexander Geddes (1800), Johann Vater (1802) and Anton Hartmann (1831) found many more documents, mostly fragmentary, assembled by editors.



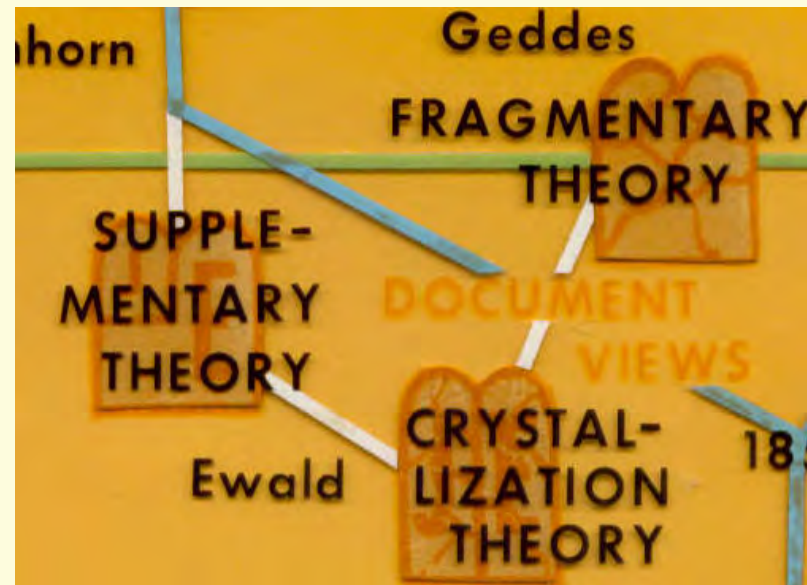
Supplementary Theory

- Heinrich Ewald (1823) noticed an impressive unity running thru Genesis. It couldn't very well be a mass of independent fragments.
- He and DeWette proposed that E was the main document, but it was supplemented by J material.



Crystallization Theory

- Ewald later developed this to solve problems in the Supplementary Theory, as it looked like both J and E materials assumed the existence of the other.
- Ewald suggested that J and E were types of material which gradually accumulated, being composed in view of the currently existing compilation.



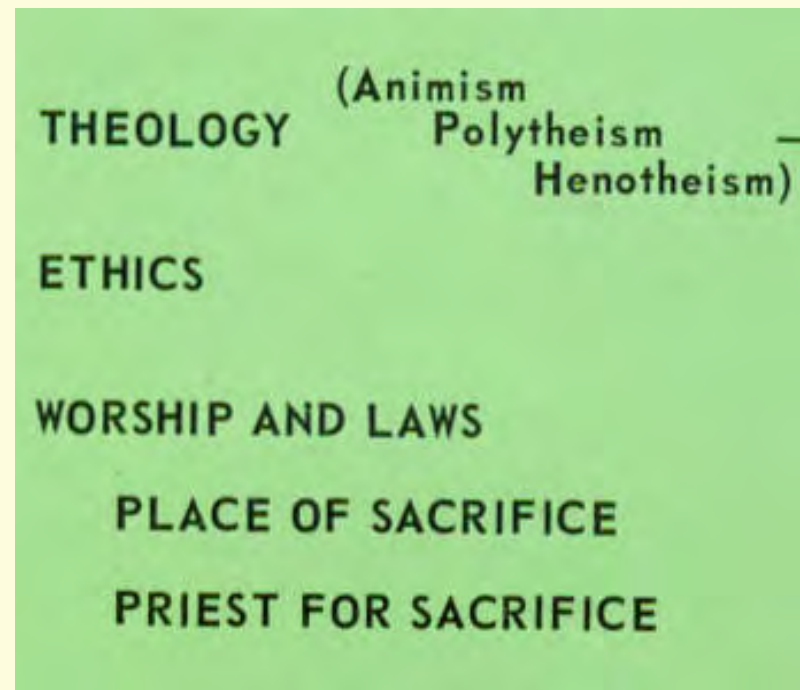
Development Theories

- Meanwhile, others were suggesting the Torah showed evidence of different stages of religion in different documents.
- DeWette (1805) proposed a plot theory in which Deuteronomy was written by priests shortly before Josiah's time (~650 BC) to get worship in Jerusalem.



Development Theories

- Now scholars began to argue they had found fossils of earlier religious views in the Torah & that these could be used to date the documents.
- This led to Hupfeld's (1853) attempt to combine stylistic criteria with developmental ones.



Modified 3-Document Theory

- Hermann Hupfeld (1853) proposed a return to the old two-document view, but with E split into two very different documents.
- One, called E, will use "Elohim" for God but have a flowing narrative style.
- The other, called P, will also use "Elohim" but have a dry, statistical style.
- This came to be viewed as a "Copernican Revolution."



The "Copernican Revolution"



"Yahweh" & flowing,
narrative style



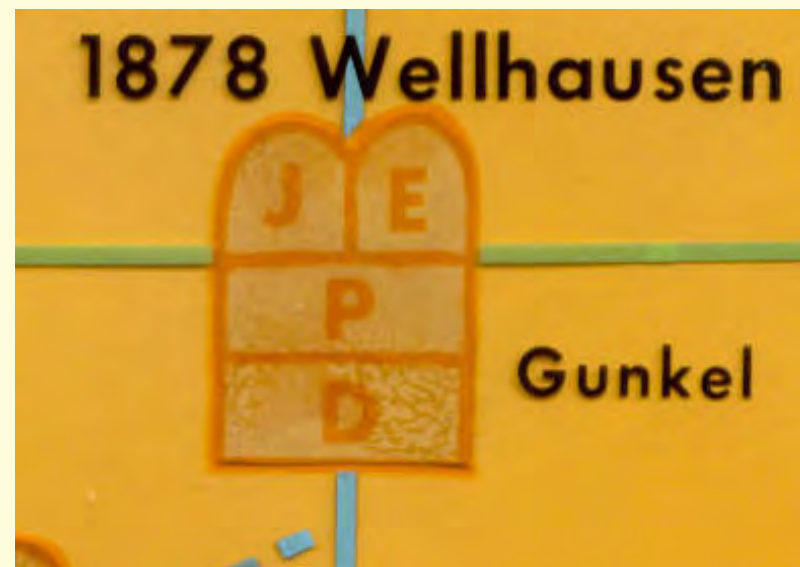
"Elohim" & dry,
genealogical style



"Elohim"
& flowing,
narrative style

The JEDP Theory

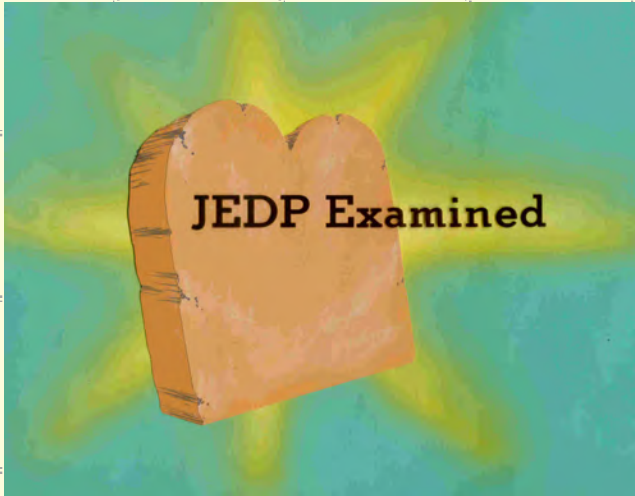
- Wellhausen (1878) powerfully presented Hupfeld's view, adding in the book of Deuteronomy as a fourth document (D) to produce his 4-document theory of the origin of the Torah.
- What others had seen as the foundational document (E in the Supp Th) became for Wellhausen (as P) the very last to be written!



Basically Moses as Author

- Other scholars feel that the evidence does not warrant dividing the text into these hypothetical documents.
- These include:
 - E W Hengstenberg
 - Wm Henry Green
 - Robt Dick Wilson
 - Edward J Young
 - Oswald T Allis
 - Allan A MacRae



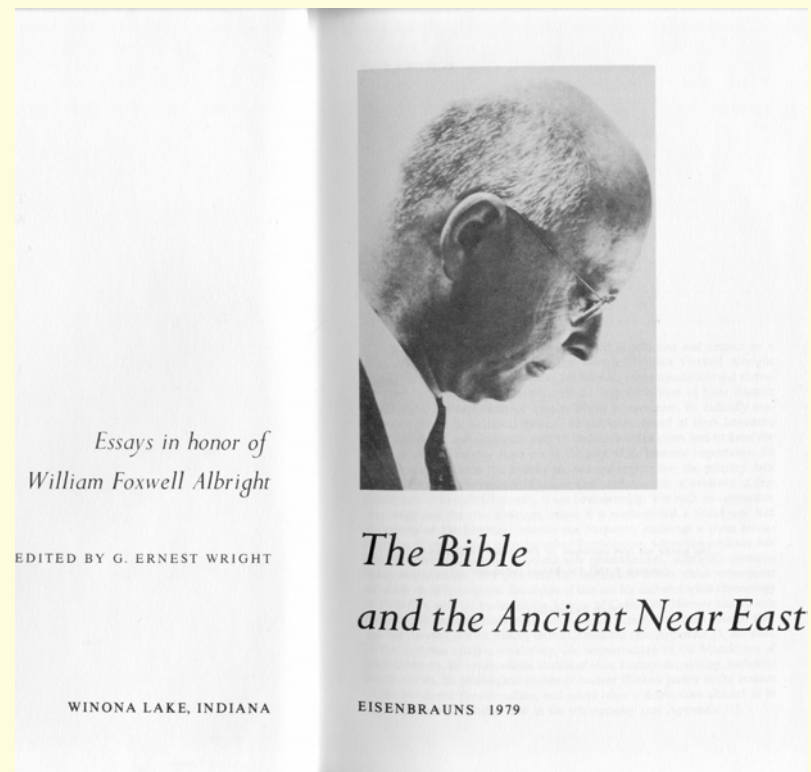


Examining the JEDP Theory

Arguments & Recent Developments

How Do Things Stand Today?

- Will consider the evidence originally put forward for the JEDP theory.
- Will make reference to recent developments
- Most of our citations will be drawn from *The Bible & the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of William F. Albright*.



The Two Pillars

"The critical orthodoxy of the day [JEDP] rested on two pillars:

[1] an analysis of documents and

[2] a theory with regard to the development of Israel's religion."

— John Bright in *BANE*, page 3

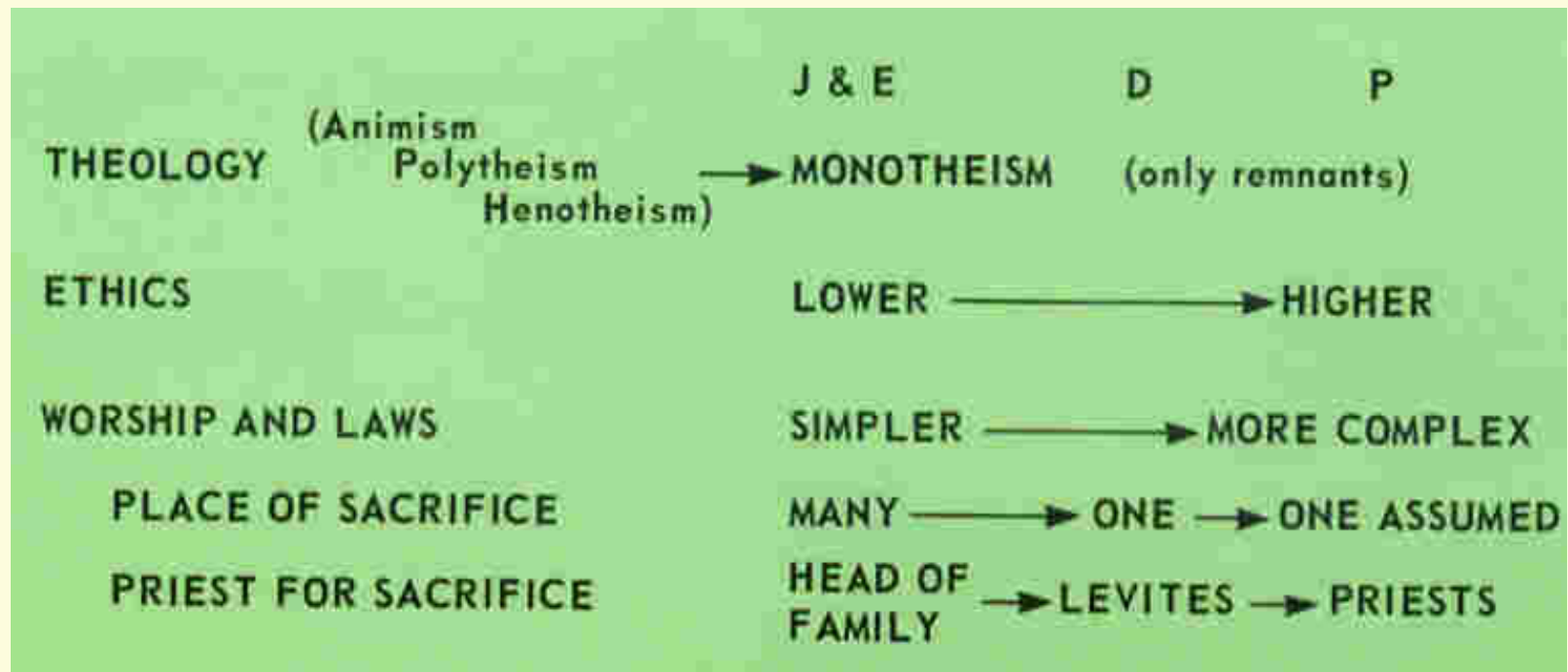
The Development Argument

Examining the JEDP Theory

The Development Argument

A great part of the reason for the acceptance of Wellhausen's theory was his skillful presentation of a particular idea of the development of Israelite religion. This idea, however, has now been almost universally discarded. Few scholars today hold to a theory of Hebrew religious development even close to that upon which Wellhausen based his idea for the sources of the Pentateuch. Yet his method of dividing sources and his view of their dates are still being presented as established fact.

The Development Argument



The Place of Worship

"As we learn from the NT, the Jews and Samaritans were not agreed on the proper place of worship, but that there could only be one was taken to be as certain as the unity of God Himself.... But this oneness of the sanctuary was not originally recognized either in fact or in law; it was a slow growth of time. With the help of the OT we are still quite able to trace the process. In doing so, it is possible to distinguish several stages of development..." – Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, p 17.

Development of Religion

"The generally accepted account of Israel's history and religion produced by Wellhausen and popularized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries survives, to be sure, today. It is especially among non-specialists that it is accepted as indubitably valid, and especially among those who would claim the label 'liberal,' religious as well as secular. Yet [it] was largely based on a Hegelian philosophy of history, not upon his literary analysis. It was an *a priori* evolutionary scheme that guided him..." – Mendenhall in *BANE*, 32.

Development of Religion

"... the reconstruction of the history of Israel and its religion, which Wellhausen carried out on the foundation of his literary analysis, has almost entirely broken down.... It was assumed that a document of a particular period could be utilized by the historian only for evidence of the period in which it was written.... This 'hyperskepticism' did not result in a 'history,' for it lacked foundations, and its builders lacked yardsticks." – Mendenhall in *BANE*, 29.

Development of Religion

"The historical worth of these documents [JEDP] — centuries removed, as they were, from the events of which they purported to tell — was held to be minimal. Instead, they were valued almost exclusively for the light they cast on the beliefs and practices of the respective periods in which they were written, not as sources of information regarding the period of Israel's origins." — Bright in *BANE*, 4.

Input from Archeology

"It has become plain that the narratives of Israel's origins found in the Hexateuch [Genesis thru Joshua], far from reflecting the circumstances of those later ages when the documents supposedly were written, reflect precisely — whatever one may say of their historical worth — those of the second millennium BC of which they purport to tell." — Bright in *BANE*, 6.

The Stylistic Argument

The claim here is that the Pentateuch consists of four distinct documents with distinct styles:

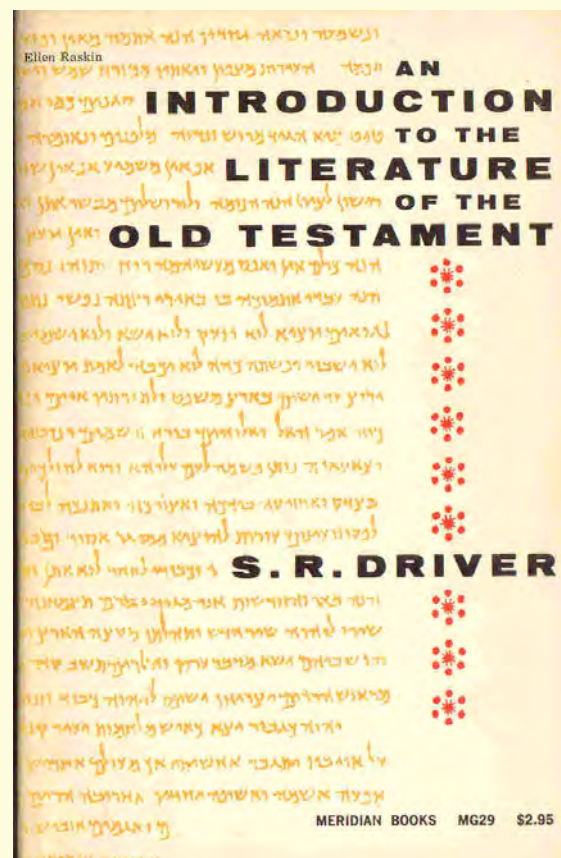
- J – flowing, narrative style, using Jahweh
- E – flowing, narrative style, using Elohim
- D – hortatory, preachy style
- P – dry, pedantic style

The Stylistic Argument

"By its taste for barren names and numbers and technical descriptions, the Priestly Code [P] comes to stand on the same line with Chronicles and the other literature of Judaism which labors at an artificial revival of the old tradition. Of a piece with this tendency is an indescribable pedantry, belonging to the very being of the author of the Priestly Code. He has a very passion for classifying and drawing plans; if he has once dissected a genus into different species, we get all the species named to us one by one every time he has occasion to mention the genus." – Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 350.

The Stylistic Argument

"Space forbids here an examination of the styles of J and E ... They have much in common; indeed, stylistic criteria alone would not generally suffice to distinguish J and E; though, when the distinction has been effected by other means, slight differences in style appear to disclose themselves." – Driver, *ILOT*, 126.



THE CRITERION OF STYLE IN GENESIS – NUMBERS

	NO. DOCUMENTS	NO. DISTINCT STYLES
TWO DOCUMENT	2	2
FRAGMENTARY	MANY	MANY
SUPPLEMENTARY	2	2
CRYSTALLIZATION	MANY	2
JEDP	3	2½*

The Stylistic Argument

- How widely can a style vary and still belong to a single person?
- Consider:
 - The painter Pablo Picasso
 - The author Charles L. Dodgson

Picasso's Style



Dodgson/Carroll's Style

- Charles Dodgson was a lecturer in math at Oxford.
- He also wrote *Alice in Wonderland* and other stories for children.
- Meeting Queen Victoria after the publication of *Alice*, the queen asked him to dedicate his next work to her.
- He did – *An Elementary Treatise on Determinants*!



The Stylistic Argument

"The determination of authorship requires the gathering and judicious assessment of as much evidence, both internal and external, as can be found. Internal evidence is normally more abundant, but is also very slippery. The premise underlying its use is that every author's work has unique idiosyncrasies of style..." – Richard D. Altick, *The Art of Literary Research*, 69.

The Stylistic Argument

Proponents of the JEDP theory claim its truth can be demonstrated by the stylistic differences among the documents. Yet these differences mostly settle down to the fact that certain parts of the Pentateuch are statistical or enumerative, while other parts are narrative, and most of Deuteronomy consists of exhortation. There is no reason why the same writer should not use each of these styles depending on the nature of the particular subject matter. Similar instances of the use of styles at least as different as these could be found in the works of nearly any extensive writer of recent years.

A Suggested Answer

- J is primarily narrative using "Yahweh."
- E is primarily narrative using "Elohim."
- D is primarily exhortation.
- P is primarily statistical and tabular material.
- Thus the stylistic variation is just a reflection of differing subject matter and genre, rather than distinct authors.

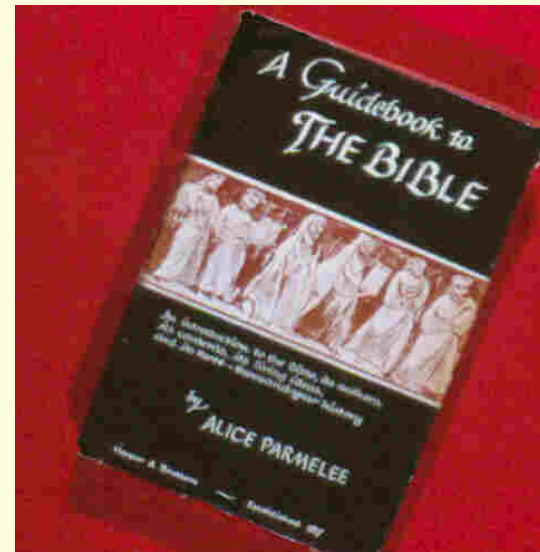
The Divine Name Argument

- This is closely related to the stylistic argument, as the latter often claims that certain words are characteristic of an author.
- The divine name argument was especially important in the history of the JEDP theory.
- The original division of documents was based on the use of "Yahweh" vs. "Elohim."

The Divine Name Argument

- In simple, popular presentations of the JEDP theory, the data is presented in a way that sounds like a very strong argument:

- J uses "Yahweh"
- E uses "Elohim."



The Divine Name Argument

"We do not know who the writer was, but from hints in his book we can piece together a number of facts about him. He was a man of Judah, living, no doubt, in Jerusalem. As his name for God was Jahveh (Yahweh), we call this writer the Jahvist, or simply J" — Parmelee, 30.



The Divine Name Argument

"As we do not know this priest's name, we take the initial letter of his word for God, Elohim, and of his tribe, Ephraim, and call this writer E and his Religious History of Israel the E Document."
– Parmelee, 34.



The Divine Name Argument

- In simple, popular presentations of the JEDP theory, the data is presented in a way that sounds like a very strong argument:
 - J uses "Yahweh"
 - E uses "Elohim."
- In fact, "Yahweh" actually occurs in all four documents and is the commonest name in each!

The Divine Name Argument

- Thus each writer of the four alleged documents is admitted to have known both names for God.
- The real "divine name view" among liberals who are familiar with the data is that the various ancient authors had different theories as to when the name Yahweh was introduced to Israel.

Alleged Duplications

The claim that there is constant duplication of material in the various alleged sources is grossly exaggerated. Some of these so-called duplications are really different events that are somewhat similar, but actually no more so than is often the case in ordinary life. In other cases an alleged repetition is merely a summary given at the beginning or end of an account, a helpful recapitulation, or a literary device to make an account more vivid. Most of these, if examined without prejudice, can be shown to have a natural purpose in the narrative.

Alleged Contradictions

Most of the alleged contradictions between the so-called sources disappear on careful examination. For instance, it is claimed that the J and P documents picture Rebecca as influenced by different motives in sending Jacob from Canaan — to escape his brother's anger, and to get a wife his parents liked. Actually there is no contradiction whatever in supposing that Rebecca was influenced by both motives and that, in dealing with the two men she wished to influence, she used in each case the argument she knew would appeal to rather than antagonize him.

Conclusions

These facts indicate there are logical reasons for the phenomena of the Pentateuch, all of them consistent with the idea of a single author. Most people who accept the JEDP theory — including most of them who teach it — do so because of their confidence in those by whom it is advanced, rather than on the basis of any thorough investigation.

For Further Reading

- Allan A MacRae, *JEDP: Lectures on the Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (1994)
- Edward J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (1964)

