**<http://imp.lss.wisc.edu/~rltroxel/Intro/hypoth.html>**

A Summary of the Documentary Hypothesis

Introduction to Biblical Literature

1. The Documentary Hypothesis claims that the Pentateuch is a composite of four separate, complete, and coherent documents.

2. Those documents are:

* J — the Yahwist. J gets its name because it uses and allows humans to use the name (Jahwe in German) before Israel exists (see Genesis 4:26; cf. E and P, below). J appears to have been composed in Judah, perhaps during Solomon's day, around 950 B.C.E.
* E — the Elohist. The name is derived from E's use of Elohim (Hebrew for "God") rather than YHWH in the early period. E reserves the name Yahweh for the time from Moses on (see Exodus 3:13-15). E appears to have been written in the north, around 850 B.C.E.
* P — the Priestly source. P is especially concerned with stories and laws relevant for priests. Like E, it reserves the name YHWH for for the period from Moses on (see Exodus 6:3). Many scholars date P either during the exile (6th century B.C.E.) or shortly after (5th century B.C.E.). Others date it as early as the beginning of the 7th century B.C.E.
* D is essentially the book of Deuteronomy. It is not mingled with J, E and P.

3. J, E and P are either placed end-to-end or intertwined (as in the flood narrative) throughout the first four books of the Bible.

4. The major strength of the hypothesis is that it accounts for the differences in ideas and terminology between various sections and stories in the Pentateuch. In particular, it provides a good explanation for the peculiar character of the material labeled P, by suggesting that P reflects the perspective and concerns of Israel's priests.

5. Recent criticisms of the hypothesis have included:

 Its assumption of originally *coherent* documents is tenuous.

The hypothesis attempts to account for discrepancies and repetitions in the Pentateuch by positing the combination of separate and *coherent* documents.

But the assumption that the original sources were logically consistent can be accepted only in the face of the fact that whoever assembled them into a single work (the Pentateuch) was not interested in producing a document free of discrepancies. If the editor(s) of the Pentateuch did not have that concern, why should we assume that those who compiled J, E and P (also relying on sources) produced coherent documents?

 Its assumption of originally *complete* documents is tenuous.

Because it is difficult to reconstruct either E or P as continuous documents, one can accept the assertion that they were originally complete documents only "by faith."

Accordingly, if one accepts the theory that E and P were originally complete documents, then one must argue that only parts of them have been preserved.

 Those who have studied the literary structure of the Pentateuch have perceived motifs and themes crossing the boundaries of the various sources (see PC, p. 120).

**Ilana Saks, Encounters**

Biblical criticism, specifically what is referred to as “high criticism”, is the study of the literary development of the biblical text, based on its different layers. The goal of such study is to isolate the different documents (or traditions) which, it is believed, once existed independently of one another and allegedly make up the Biblical text. Although it is not the first study of this sort, the most well-known formulation of this type of analysis, commonly known as the “Documentary Hypothesis”, is found in Wellhausen’s *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*; *Geschichte Israels* and *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*. Generally speaking Wellhausen divides the Pentateuch into four documents J, E, P and D. J and E are so called because of the prevalent usage of “JHWH” and “Elohim”, respectively, for God’s name. P is the writer who wrote from a priestly perspective. Finally, D is the author of the book of Deuteronomy who has his own agenda and point of view. Wellhausen, under the influence of Hegelian philosophy, which saw all things in evolutionary terms, believed that Israelite religion had evolved from its more primitive and crude form to a more elevated version. Using this criterion for dating his documents, he believed that the chronological ordering of the documents should be J and E, D and then P, which according to his criterion revealed successive steps in ancient Israelite religion.

**משנת רבי אליעזר פרשה ז עמוד 139 - 140**

כל מקום שנ' א-להים, זו מדת הדין, ה' מדת רחמים. נברא העולם בזו ובזו, שנ' ביום עשות ה' א-להים ארץ ושמים, שהוא צריך למדת הדין ולמדת רחמים. ניתנה התורה בזו ובזו, שנ' אנכי ה' א-להיך, שיש בה מתן שכר ופורענות.

**Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer Parasha 7:139-140**

Wherever it is written YHWH, [it connotes] the attribute of Mercy; [wherever it is written] Elohim, [it connotes] the attribute of Justice. [Two examples:] The world was created with both [of these attributes], as it says, "in the day that YHWH Elohim made earth and heaven" (Genesis 2:4), because it needs both the attribute of Justice and the attribute of Mercy. And the Torah was given with both, as it says, "I am YHWH your God (Elohim) ..." (Exodus 20:2), because it contains reward and punishment.

**ויקרא כג**

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶּם מִמָחֳרַת הַשַבָת מִיּוֹם הֲבִיאֲכֶּם אֶּת־עמֶֹּר הַתְנוּפָה שֶּבַע שַבָתוֹת תְמִימתֹ תִהְיֶּינָה: עַד מִמָחֳרַת הַשַבָת הַשְבִיעִת תִסְפְרוּ חֲמִשִים יוֹם...

**דברים טז:ט**

שִבְעָה שָבֻעתֹ תִסְפָר־לָךְ מֵהָחֵל חֶּרְמֵש בַקָמָה תָ חֵל לִסְפרֹ שִבְעָה שָבֻעוֹת:

**בראשית לו:לא**

וְאֵלֶּה הַמְלָכִים אֲשֶּר מָלְכוּ בְאֶּרֶּץ אֱדוֹם לִפְנֵי מְלָךְ־מֶּלֶּךְ לִבְנֵי יִשְרָאֵל:

**Ibn Ezra**

“And these were the kings” – Some say this section was written prophetically.

And Yitzchaki said in his book that this section was written in the days of Yehoshaphat, and [Yitzchaki] explained the generations as he wished. For this is he named Yitzchak, for all who hear will laugh at him, for he said that Hadad isthe Edomite Hadad, and Meheitavel is the sister of Tachpanches. Chalilah, chalilah, for it to be about Yehoshaphat’sday as he said! His book should be burned. Why did he express shock at the eight kings who reigned, that they are many? There were double the kings in Yisrael, and these two kings were close to two kings in Yisrael, and there were also more kings in Yehudah than in Edom before the time of Moshe.In truth, “before a king reigned” refers to Moshe, King of Israel, as Devarim 33:5 says, “And there was a king in Yeshurun.”

**Rabbi Zvi Tau, *Tzadik Be-emunato Yichye*, pp. 10, 19**

One who does not believe in the Divine origin and sublimity of the words, that they all flow from Divine truth that is infinite, absolute and eternal – one who lacks this faith will not understand the holy Scriptures whatsoever. All of his analyses, all of his investigations, all of his theories, and all of his "discoveries" fall into the category of nonsense…

When all these ideas are missing, when humility and self-effacement are lacking, when these elements are absent, come the scholars – Jews or gentiles, it makes no difference - and search through the holy Scriptures. They raise objections, they erase, they distort, and they emend; they suggest theories, they demonstrate creativity, they present novel ideas – what is all this to us? How are we connected to them? We occupy ourselves in the truth of the Torah, we engage ourselves in the holiness of the Torah. One who lacks both the beginning and the end – there is no point in talking to him at all!

**Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann (1843 – 1921) quoted in "Scholarship and faith: David Hoffman and his relationship to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*"**

I willingly agree that, in consequence of the foundation of my belief, I am unable to arrive at the conclusion that the Pentateuch was written by anyone other than Moses ... We believe that the whole Bible is true, holy, and of divine origin. That every word of the Torah was inscribed by divine command is expressed in the principle Torah min Ha Shamayim ... We must not presume to set ourselves up as critics of the author of a biblical text or doubt the truth of his statements or question the correctness of his teaching ... The Jewish commentator must (therefore) constantly be on guard against interpreting the passage in such a way as to appear to be in conflict with traditional Halachah. Just as the Torah as a divine revelation must not contradict itself, in the same way it must not contradict the Oral Law which is of divine origin.

**Rabbi Benno Jacob (1862–1945), quoted in "The Rebirth of Omnisignificant Biblical Exegesis in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries"**

 [The Bible’s] means of representation may be termed the semi-poetic or dichotomistic. It proceeds like poetry, but without its strict measure [i.e., meter], employing instead paired thoughts, patterns of words and clauses and syntax, in doublets, parallels and contrasts; it is rooted, when all is said and done, in the Semitic [way of thought], which grasps matters dichotomously. This manner of seeing, conceiving and representing dominates the Hebrew language and literature in its entirety, to its subtlest manifestations.

**Rabbi Umberto Cassuto (1883 - 1951), *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch*, 30 – 32**

 [W]e must clarify, to the best of our ability, why just in certain sections or verses the Torah narratives have the Tetragrammaton and in others ’Elohim. Is it possible to formulate rules with regard to the use of the Names in proximity to each other? I believe that we are able to answer this question affirmatively. On the basis of what we have stated so far, we may assume that in each case the Torah chose one of the two Names according to the context and intention, precisely as follows:

     It selected the name YHWH when the text reflects the Israelite conception of God, which is embodied in the portrayal of YHWH and finds expression in the attributes traditionally ascribed to Him by Israel, particularly in His ethical character; it preferred the name ’Elohim when the passage implies the abstract idea of the Deity prevalent in the international circles of ‛wise men’—God conceived as the Creator of the physical universe, as the Ruler of nature, as the Source of life.

     The Tetragrammaton is used, when expression is given to the direct, intuitive notion of God, which characterizes the simple faith of the multitude or the ardour of the prophetic spirit; the name ’Elohim, when the concept of thinkers who meditate on the lofty problems connected with the existence of the world and humanity is to be conveyed.

     The name YHWH occurs when the context depicts the Divine attributes in relatively lucid and, as it were, palpable terms, a clear picture being conveyed; ’Elohim, when the portrayal is more general, superficial and hazy, leaving an impression of obscurity.

     The Tetragrammaton is found when the Torah seeks to arouse in the soul of the reader or the listener the feeling of the sublimity of the Divine Presence in all its majesty and glory; the name ’Elohim, when it wishes to mention God in an ordinary manner, or when the expression or thought may not, out of reverence, be associated directly with the Holiest Name.

     The name YHWH is employed when God is presented to us in His personal character and in direct relationship to people or nature; and ’Elohim, when the Deity is alluded to as a Transcendental Being who exists completely outside and above the physical universe.

     The Tetragrammaton appears when the reference is to the God of Israel relative to His people or to their ancestors; ’Elohim, when He is spoken of in relation to one who is not a member of the Chosen People.

     YHWH is mentioned when the theme concerns Israel’s tradition; and ’Elohim, when the subject-matter appertains to the universal tradition.

**Rabbi Umberto Cassuto (1883 - 1951), *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch*, 36**

 [T]he verses in the narrative of the Flood in which the Tetragrammaton occurs conform exactly, as I have already indicated, to our rules. The name YHWH appears when the moral motive, which extends indeed through the whole story, is accorded special prominence and emphasis, as in the punishment of the wicked on account of their wickedness and in the prosperity of Noah because of his righteousness (vi 5–8; vii 1); so, too, when reference is made to the sacrifices, or to the clean animals that Noah was commanded to take with him into the Ark for the purpose of bringing oblations from them after the Flood (vii 5; viii 20–21); likewise when it is intended to express a direct—as it were, palpable— relationship between God and Noah, the relationship of a father full of compassion towards his son, who is dear to his heart (vii 16: and YHWH shut him in); similarly when Scripture reverts to the curse upon the ground (viii 21), which is mentioned in the section that uses the Tetragrammaton. In these verses we find the name YHWH; in the rest of the account of the Deluge, ’Elohim occurs for the reasons given.

**Rabbi Mordechai Breuer (1921 - 2007), "The Study of Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction?", 170 - 171**

This is the position that we have staked out. God, who is beyond the limitations of time and space, prepared the Torah, declaring in one utterance what man can comprehend only as a combination of differing sources. Before the world was created, God redacted one document characterized by justice and one characterized by mercy, synthesized them with the quality of harmony. After a thousand generations this Torah, "black fire on white fire," descended to earth. Moses, the faithful shepherd, was summoned to the upper realm, and brought it down to the terrestrial sphere.