

Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis or JEDP Theory

The JEDP Theory found its roots in Jean Astruc (1684-1766), who speculated that Moses used existing written or oral sources in constructing Genesis. By analyzing a) the use of different names of God, b) stylistic differences, and c) patterns, Astruc saw clues of a composite or editorial structure.

This method of biblical criticism became known as source criticism, and Astruc believed that Genesis was written from two main sources, the **Jahwist** (Jehovah) and the **Elohist** (Elohim), which he later thought was too simplistic.

By the early 1800s and contrary to the traditional dating of Mosaic authorship around 1450 BC, the idea that the Pentateuch was written around 900-800 BC was introduced.

Other scholars developed this form of biblical criticism resulting in K. Graf (1815-1869) and Julius Wellhausen's (1844-1918) 19th century classic the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis. Wellhausen's work was influential, because he was able to persuasively correlate the history and development of the Pentateuch with the development of the Jewish faith. This hypothesis became later known as the Documentary Hypothesis.

The classical JEDP theorists have identified four basic, diverse, and independent literary narrative sources within the Pentateuch: **Jahwist** or **Yahwist**, the **Elohist**, the **Deuteronomist**, and the **Priestly** code. These individual sources were composed at and represented different periods of time in the nation of Israel.

J was hypothesized to live about 900–850 BC in the Southern Kingdom of Judah during the divided Kingdom. Collecting myths and legends of the Ancient Near East (i.e. Creation, Flood, Babel), **J** wrote most of Genesis. This source is characterized by: it's attention on man and earth, God as YHWH who interacts with man, emphasis on Judah, emphasis on Israel's leaders, and use of the term Sinai.

E was hypothesized to live about 750–700 BC in Israel's Northern Kingdom. This hypothetical source used the generic term for God Elohim until Exodus 3-6; **E** wrote some of Genesis and most of Exodus and Numbers. This source is characterized by: God as Elohim, emphasis on Northern Israel, and use of Horeb for Sinai.

D was hypothesized to have written most of Deuteronomy around 650-625 BC. It was speculated that this was the book found by King Josiah in the Temple in Jerusalem in 621 BC (2 Kings 22:8). This source is characterized by: God as Elohim (until Exodus 3), emphasis on Judah, a cultic approach to God, and presence of genealogies and lists.

P was hypothesized to be a priest(s) who lived during the Babylonian Exile. This source provided chronology, genealogy, the book of Leviticus, and the code for priesthood and worship. This source is characterized by: emphasis on the Temple and obedience to the law.

Wellhausen hypothesized that the sources were joined in the following manner:

1. **J** was written around 900–850 BC by an unknown person for unknown reasons.
2. **E** was written around 750–700 BC by an unknown person for unknown reasons.
3. At some unknown time, an anonymous editor edits and combines **J** and **E** and attends to discrepancies and introduces doublets.
4. **D** was written around 650-625 BC by an unknown person for unknown reasons.
5. At some unknown time, an anonymous editor edits and combines **D** with **JE** and adds new material.
6. **P** was written around 525-425 BC by an unknown person for unknown reasons.
7. At some unknown time, an anonymous editor edits and combines **P** with **JED** and adds some new material to harmonize the document. This finished document, is called the Hexateuch by higher critics.

In his theory, Wellhausen had determined that it took 22 writers to write the Hexateuch.

Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis was at its zenith during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the debate revolved about the dating of sources, when they were combined, and the number of writers or schools of writers. JEDP theory ultimately grew in complexity having more sources (ie J1, J2, etc) and more editors (redactor 5, 6, etc). Adherents to JEDP theory believed that the Pentateuch reached its final form during the time of Kings (1050-586 BC) or as late as the Post-Exilic Period (538-432 BC).

Today, as the result of problems and criticisms brought on by anthropological and archeological findings and literary analysis, very few biblical scholars hold to JEDP theory or to Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis.

Instead of seeking sources, scholars are more intent on discovering how the final form of the Pentateuch arrived, and in fact are moving away from Source Criticism. This focus on a literary analysis of the Pentateuch rediscovered the beauty of Genesis and the artistry of the author; however, destructive critics will still not accept Mosaic authorship. As they continue to seek evidence to support a 500 BC dating, destructive critics seem convinced that the Jews did not have their faith and religion written down until this late dating.

Despite the academic trend away from Source Criticism and the Documentary Hypothesis for the last 40 years, the arguments for JEDP theory continue to be repeated in colleges, universities, and skeptics who desire to refute Christianity.