

The Doctrine of Documentary Hypothesis—a Summary

Authorship credit: This information was taken primarily from Josh McDowell's book *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. For those who have been taken in by either of these theories need to read this book. For those who think that I am beating a dead horse with this summary, Josh would be too thorough for you. While I am mentioning Josh's name, I should point out that his first book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* or his compilation book *A Ready Defense* are excellent for the new Christian, who questions the rationality and the validity of the basic beliefs of Christianity. Some people when they are saved buy into Christianity hook line and sinker. Others, like myself, wonder *what the hell did I just do—am I acting rationally and do I believe in something which is even close to logical?* If you question the beliefs of Christianity, there are few books as well organized and as thorough as his.

Documentary Hypothesis: Documentary Hypothesis simply asserts that the Pentateuch was not authored by Moses but written 1000 years after Moses by several authors who wrote portions here and there and then other men have performed extensive revisions and editing after them. This is also known as the JEDP hypothesis. The primary authors of the Pentateuch are thought to be four: J is the Yahwist, who is completely unknown, who continually used God's name, YHWH throughout his writings. He recorded the legends, stories, myths, and oral traditions from several cultures and weaved this into the history of the Jews. E is the Elohist, because this person so often used the name Elohim. He allegedly wrote his portion of Scripture in 700 BC, recording the traditions of his day. As we have seen, these two names for God are used continually, but not interchangeably throughout Genesis. Because of this problem, these two sources are often combined as producers of the JE document. It is thought that another unknown author combined the works of both of these men, thus accounting for the apparent (but not real) differences in some stories (such as the creation account in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis). D is the Deuteronomic Law, confined primarily to Deuteronomy (although J and E both contributed small portions here and there), and discovered in 621 BC. P stands for a priest or a group of priest who recorded the priestly code, which were a set of laws or codes dealing with the holiness of the people. They later worked in the J and E (or the JE) document(s), as editors, into their own work.

The rationalization for documentary hypothesis is simple: some people do not want to believe that the Bible is God's Word. There are several reasons for taking this position: (1) they do not fully comprehend the symbiotic and synchronic relationship between human and divine authorship or they do not accept it; (2) although most would readily agree that God has the ability to author the Bible (that is, those that believe in God), they do not believe that He has; and, (3) they just do not believe in the Biblically supernatural, which would therefore preclude prophecy and the recording of divine intervention into human history, which would eliminate creation, miracles, and God speaking to the saints. (4) Historians like to believe that man began worshipping nature and natural forces, generalized this into a pantheon of gods, and narrowed this down to one God. Perhaps the next logical step in this progression is the reduction to no God. Nevertheless, this is purely hypothesis, but it does not jive with Mosaic authorship; therefore, they reject Mosaic authorship.

Objections to Documentary Hypothesis:

1. *There are no literary references, no extant manuscripts of any kind, which mention the J, E, E or P documents, either singly or as a group. They have been created...* G. Herbert Livingston, PhD, professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary.
2. There is cultural and historical information found throughout the Pentateuch (particularly in Genesis) which would have been unknown outside of that time period (these are things which have recently become known to us through Archeology). As we have gone through Genesis, I have pointed these things out from time to time. Refer to Gen. 14:18 31:30 36:20 by way of examples. One of the many examples is Lot's heavy door—this fits in precisely with his time period. Had this been written down 1000 years later, as has been supposed the those who support documentary hypothesis, during a time of archways and no doors, how would they have known the about the conditions a millennium previous? Another examples: archeology supports that the area around Jordan was fertile and heavily populated around 2065 BC, a soon thereafter abandoned, which

is in accord with the information in Genesis which we have concerning Sodom, Gomorrah and the other three cities of the circle of Jordan.¹

3. George Mendenhall, PhD from John Hopkins University, professor of Near Eastern languages and literature at the University of Michigan: *Wellhausen's [a strong proponent of documentary hypothesis] theory of the history of Israelite religion was very largely based on a Hegelian philosophy of history, not upon his literary analysis. It was an a priori evolutionary scheme which guided him in the utilization of his sources.*
4. Those supporting documentary hypothesis try to reverse the order of the Bible, claiming the prophets preceded the Law, but all of the prophets consistently appeal to a body of law in existence and well-known during their times (e.g., Amos 2:4).
5. As cited in our study of inspiration, 4 books of the Law cite Mosaic authorship specifically innumerable times. Other Old Testament writers of Scripture bear witness of this (Joshua 1:7, 8 I Kings 2:3 II Kings 14:6 I Chron. 22:13 Ezra 3:2 Neh. 8:1 Dan. 9:11 Mal. 4:4 (see p. 93 in *More Evidence* for additional references). Those from the New Testament also cite Moses as the author of at least four of the books of the Pentateuch (Luke 2:22 20:28 John 1:45 Rom. 10:4 Heb. 9:19 Rev. 15:3 (pp. 93–94). We have the tradition of the Jews as recorded in the Apocrypha and the Talmud, quotes by Philo and Josephus; and similar traditions in the early Christian church.
6. To make the facts fit their theories, documentarians even divide up close to 100 individual verses from the Pentateuch into two or more sources (a list is given in *More Evidence* p. 129). In doing research, I can personally testify that is not only unbelievably tedious but the chances of producing a single manuscript from all of that which is soon thereafter accepted as God's Word strains credibility. That would be a divine miracle.
7. Josh McDowell deals further with the claims of documentarians with regards to style, diction and vocabulary and soundly refutes those claims. However, there are a small number of people who are seriously challenged by this pseudo-intellectual viewpoint and I recommend Josh's book to them for further personal edification.

Assertions by Documentary Hypothesis and Answers:

1. **Assertion:** Monotheism was not a part of the early history of Israel; it began with Amos. **Answer:** Monotheism was found in Egypt between 1400 and 1350 BC; in Babylonia between 1500-1200 BC. Gleason Archer Jr., PhD², chairman of Old Testament studies and instructor at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: "It is an uncontested fact of history that no other nation (apart from those influenced by the Hebrew faith) ever did develop a true monotheistic religion which commanded the general allegiance of its people...it remains incontrovertible that neither the Egyptians, nor the Babylonians, nor the Greeks ever embrace a monotheistic faith on a national basis."
2. **Assertion:** The religious tenets of Israel were borrowed from surrounding countries and cultures. **Answer:** Whereas the Babylonian creation myths are filled with the supernatural and surreal; and crude polytheism, Genesis presents God as the one Creator and Ruler of the Universe. There is not a trace of battles between the gods in the creation account given in Genesis as we find in pagan myths. The male-female duality often found in the deities of other religions are totally absent from fundamental Judaism.
3. **Assertion:** The second commandment could not have been given during the time of Moses; mankind was infatuated with religious images. **Answer:** There is no archeological evidence of any YHWH images found among the ruins of the olden cities. Had the people been polytheistic, we would have evidence of that fact.
4. **Assertion:** On the one hand, documentary hypothesis claims that the laws of Moses were too advanced for any culture of his day (it does not fit their model of evolution); furthermore, they were copied from similar sets of laws in the ancient world. **Answer:** You can't have it both ways. If other lands had relatively sophisticated laws (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi³), then there is no reason that Israel could not. On the other hand, there is no reason to think that these laws originated outside of Israel.

¹Merill Unger, *Archeology and the Old Testament*, 1954

²Archer's BA, MA and PhD all originate from Harvard; he also has an LLB from the Suffolk University Law School and a BD from Princeton Seminary.

³To be studied when we arrive at the Law of Moses

5. **Assertion:** Writing was virtually unknown in Israel during the time of Moses. **Answer:** We have throughout Genesis made reference to archeological discoveries of writings found in nearby lands prior to and coterminous with Moses. British Assyriologist A. H. Sayce: *Centuries before Abraham was born Egypt and Babylonia were alike full of schools and libraries, of teachers and pupils, of poets and prose-writers, and of the literary works which they had composed.* W. F. Albright, PhD, cites five different kinds of languages committed to written form and their usages as discovered by archeology found in Palestine and Syria alone during the times of the Patriarchs.
6. **Assertion:** The Old Testaments if filled with both fictional characters and types (e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham) and actual historical figures (King David, Nehemiah). **Answer:** *Dossin and Jean are editing the thousands of tablets from Mari; every new publication of theirs helps us better to understand the life and times of the Hebrew Patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob no longer seem isolated figures, much less reflections of later Israelite history; they appear as true children of their age, bearing the same names, moving about over the same territory, visiting the same towns (especially Haran and Nahor), practicing the same customs as their contemporaries. In other words, the patriarchal narratives have a historical nucleus throughout, although it is like the a long oral transmission of the original poems and later prose sagas which underlie the present text of Genesis has considerably refracted the original events.* May I add that there is actually nothing which indicates that all of Genesis was transmitted orally until the time of Moses. There is no reason in the world to suppose that the events of Genesis were recorded centuries after their occurrence. G. E. Wright from *Present State of Biblical Archeology* (1947): *Some of the patriarchal episodes seem unusual, even to the later Israelites but this find at Nuzu [Nuzi] clears the picture.*