

8 Mosaic Authorship and the Documentary (JEDP) Hypothesis

One of the most interesting and contentious elements of Biblical scholarship is the question of authorship of the Torah or Pentateuch. There are two main theories which have vied for supremacy over the years. These two theories are *Mosaic Authorship* and *The Documentary Hypothesis* (also known as *JEDP*). Mosaic Authorship is the traditional view held for the majority of Jewish and Christian history (and always held by conservative Christian Biblical scholars) while JEDP enjoyed a great deal of popularity following the Enlightenment. JEDP is still believed by many scholars today as it seems to harmonize many of the inconsistencies and avoids a number of the problems of Mosaic Authorship, but there is a growing academic movement which is returning to Mosaic Authorship (albeit often with elements of JEDP incorporated).

As with all competing theories concerning authorship of books of the Bible, there are advantages and problems with both hypotheses.

Mosaic Authorship – an overview

Mosaic authorship is the traditional ascription to Moses of the authorship of the five books of the Torah or Pentateuch - Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

The belief in Mosaic authorship of the Torah is found in the Torah itself which states, "So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel." Deuteronomy 31:9

The belief of Mosaic authorship excluding the Torah's testimony is first found explicitly expressed in the Talmud, a collection of Jewish traditions and exegesis said supposedly to date to the time of Moses himself. The commentary section of the talmud though dates to 500 AD, and indicate that the authors of the later books of the Hebrew bible already accepted the idea that Moses had written the Torah. The Talmudic commentators advanced several versions of just how Moses came to write the Torah, ranging from direct dictation by God to a less direct divine inspiration stretching over the forty years in the wilderness. Later rabbis (and the Talmudic rabbis as well see tractate Bava Basra 15a) and Christian scholars noticed some difficulties with the idea of Mosaic authorship of the entire Torah, notably the fact that the book of Deuteronomy describes Moses' death. The later versions of the tradition therefore held that some portions of the Torah were added by others - the death of Moses in particular was ascribed to Joshua.

Mosaic authorship was accepted with very little discussion by both Jews and Christians until the 17th century, when the rise of secular scholarship and the associated willingness to subject even the Bible to the test of reason led to its rejection by mainstream biblical scholars, while supporting some variations of the Documentary hypothesis.

Origins and nature of the tradition

The Torah itself makes a statement of authorship in various verses. Notable among these is Deuteronomy 31:9 and 31:24-26, describing how Moses writes "this law" on a scroll and lays it beside the ark of the Covenant. Similar passages include, for example, Exodus 17:14, "And Jehovah said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven;" Exodus 24:4, "And Moses wrote all the words of Jehovah, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel;" and Exodus 34:27, "And Jehovah said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel." Also Leviticus 26:46 states, "These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the LORD established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses"

Joshua (1:7-8), Kings (I Kings 2-3, II Kings 23:21 and 25), Chronicles (II Chronicles 8:13, 34:14 and 35:12), Ezra (3:2 and 6:18) and Nehemiah (8:1 and 13:1) all contain verses implying belief

in Mosaic authorship of the Torah, indicating that the belief possibly existed during the time of Joshua, his book is traditionally said to have been written around the 1300's BC. Also because of the belief in Mosaic authorship is found in the book of Nehemiah it can be certain that this belief existed during the Post-Exilic period. It was certainly well established by the time of the Talmud (c. 200-500 AD), the authors of which held that Moses received the Torah during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The early Christian church with its Jewish roots accepted the Torah, and Mosaic authorship, as part of its own spiritual inheritance.

Menachem Mendel Kasher cites a number of Bible verses and rabbinic statements that would appear to suggest that Moses already had certain documents (possibly authored by the Patriarchs) that he used made use of when redacting (that is, editing) Genesis.

The Authors of the Gospels also appear to believe in Mosaic authorship (they ascribe authorship of the Torah to Moses in the narrative), as did the famous Roman historians Philo, and Josephus Flavius.

The challenge of secular scholarship

Until the 17th century AD Mosaic authorship of the Torah was an assumption, not a subject of discussion. A few rabbis, and even fewer Christian scholars, questioned Moses's authorship of a few verses, notably those in Deuteronomy describing his death, but none doubted that the bulk of the Torah was by him.

This changed with the Reformation and the European Enlightenment, when philosophers and scholars such as Thomas Hobbes, Benedict Spinoza, and Jean Astruc began to investigate the origins of the Pentateuch, and by the 19th century the idea was no longer entertained by mainstream academic scholarship. In the closing decades of the 19th century Julius Wellhausen put forward the Documentary hypothesis, the theory that the Pentateuch had its origins in four source documents composed at various times during the 1st millennium BC and not combined into the final Torah until c.450 BC, and this became universally accepted for almost a hundred years. Since the late 1960s the hypothesis has been increasingly challenged, but general consensus among scholars remains that the five books were composed towards the second half of the 1st millennium BC.

The Mosaic tradition in the modern age

Many of the supposed contradictions and inconsistencies said to exist in the Torah as noted by critical scholars have been well noted by the classical Jewish sources (and in part form the basis of the Oral Torah). R' David Zvi Hoffman in his commentary to Leviticus made use of rabbinic homiletical and exegetical interpretations as well as some of his own insights to explain the text in light of the difficulties noted by the critics. He also authored a book "Die wichtigsten Instanzen gegen die Graf-Wellhausensche Hypothese" pointing out several difficulties in the Wellhasuen hypothesis, most notably in his theory that the Priestly code (and hence the Jewish conception of monotheism) was of late post-exilic redaction. While his approach to biblical investigation was essentially the result of the conditions of his time and place, they have stood the test of time and are still studied.

Another scholar Benno Jacob developed a theory concerning the internal rhythm of the Bible, which is expressed by the repetition of key words in set numbers in the narratives of the Torah and its laws. The programmatic statement in his 1916 book, *Quellenscheiden und Exegese im Pentateuch*, illustrates his concerns:

The Bible's means of representation (Darstellungsweise) 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.

Several attempts have been made to reconcile the results of the documentary hypothesis with the traditional belief that Moses wrote the Torah. This approach accepts the facts that Bible critics cite as proof of a composite document while differing on the interpretation of these facts.

R' David Zvi Hoffman points to a statement in the Babylonian Talmud Gittin 60a that states "Said R' Yochanan, the Torah was given in a series of small scrolls". This implies that the Torah was written gradually and compiled from a variety of documents over time. This may account for the composite appearance of the Pentateuch.

Dr. Mordechai Breuer's approach is as follows. The Torah must speak in "the language of men." But the wisdom that God would bestow upon us cannot be disclosed in a straightforward manner. The Torah therefore resorts to a technique of multivocal communication. Each strand in the text, standing on its own, reveals one aspect of the truth, and each aspect of the truth appears to contradict the other accounts. An insensitive reader, noticing the tension between the versions, imagines himself assaulted by a cacophony of conflicting voices. The perceptive student, however, experiences the magnificent counterpoint in all its power. To use Rabbi Breuer's example: Genesis 1 (the so-called P account) describes one aspect of the biblical understanding of creation; Genesis 2 (the so-called J version) presents a complementary way of apprehending God's creation of the world and of man. Each text, isolated from the other, would offer a partial, hence misleading, doctrine of creation. In their juxtaposition, the two texts point the reader toward an understanding of the whole.

In *Revelation Restored*, Dr. David Weiss Halivni develops a theory of Chate'u Yisroel (lit. Israel has sinned). He writes;

According to the biblical account itself, the people of Israel forsook the Torah, in the dramatic episode of the golden calf, only forty days after the revelation at Sinai. From that point on, until the time of Ezra, the scriptures reveal that the people of Israel were steeped in idolatry and negligent of the Mosaic law. Chate'u Yisrael, as a theological account, explains that in the period of neglect and syncretism the Torah of Moses became blemished and maculated

This process, explains Dr. Halivni, continued until the time of Ezra, when finally, upon their return from Babylon, the people accepted the Torah upon themselves. It was at that time, R. Halivni claims, that the previously rejected, and therefore maculated, text of the Torah was recompiled and edited, by Ezra and his "entourage." That this is what happened, Halivni claims, is attested to in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In addition, R. Halivni supports his theory with talmudic and midrashic sources which indicate that Ezra played a certain role in editing the Torah.

He further states that while the text of the Pentateuch was corrupted, an oral tradition preserved intact many of the laws of the Bible. This is why the Oral law appears to contradict the Biblical text in certain details.

Possible evidence of Mosaic authorship

Literary Evidence

Egyptian terminology in the Torah

Certain forms in standard Biblical Hebrew are borrowed from second-millennium Egyptian. This is seen in how the birth narratives of Moses are full of words of Egyptian origin (instead of Hebrew origin), examples include, basket, bulrushes, pitch, reeds, river, and river-bank. Also Genesis 41 which speaks of the Pharaoh's dream during the time of Joseph uses several Egyptian words such as, the word for magician. The Torah is also known to use phrases which are of Egyptian origin in which the words are translated word for word. One may infer that these forms were adopted during the sojourn and were made a permanent part of standard Hebrew by their inclusion in the Pentateuch.

Antiquity of the Hebrew found in the Torah

The Torah has the tendency to use some archaic Hebrew forms, which suggests that its origin antedates the Israelite monarchies. For example, Genesis has a common 3rd person singular pronoun form -hw; Joshua and later works breaks this into masculine and feminine forms. Also of note, is that the word "Goshen", which is mentioned extensively throughout the Torah, is only used in the pre-monarchy texts (the latest reference is found in Joshua 15); all subsequent biblical references to the area do not refer to this. Some of the poetic material preserved in the Torah is incredibly ancient, and reflects syntax and semantic usages that disappeared later in the Old Testament historical period. The poetry of the Bible, like that of other Northwest Semitic literatures, employs a language which differs in various ways from the language of prose, reflecting, in general, an earlier stage of Hebrew and with a closer affinity in language, style, and content with neighboring dialects, especially those to the north." Notable among the biblical passages that best reflect Archaic Hebrew are the Blessings of Jacob (Gn 49), the Song of Moses (Ex 15), Balaam (Nm 23-24), the Oracles of and the Poem of Moses (Dt 32), the and of Moses (Dt 33). One also finds widespread use of the third person pronominal suffix -mo (e.g. Ex 15.5,7), the second person feminine suffix -ky, the third person singular masculine suffix -h instead of -w (e.g. Gen 49.11), infinitive absolute with temporal value (e.g. Ex 15.6), zo and zu used as relative particles (Ex 15.13), use of the negative bal instead of lo, the verbal suffix -t in the third person feminine (e.g. Dt 32.36) traces of the old case endings in nouns suffixed by -i or -o in the construct state (e.g. Gen 49.11; Nm 23.18). "Expressions used almost exclusively in poetry include hapax legomena and other rare words, which tend to be concentrated in the oldest biblical texts. Generally it may be said that these items existed during the archaic period of the language, later disappearing from normal use...The occurrence of so many lexical items of this kind in a single passage is evidence of its antiquity."

Biblical manuscripts

In 1979, two silver scrolls that were used as amulets, inscribed with portions of the well-known Priestly Blessing of the Book of Numbers were discovered in a burial cave near Jerusalem. These scrolls have been dated to close to 600 BCE based on late Iron Age artifacts found in the undisturbed area of the tomb where they were located.

Should these datings be correct the date of the Torah would be much older than what most Biblical critics think it is, it would also mean it would be more likely for the Torah to have been written by Moses because of this earlier date.

Also based on paleographic evidence Erik Waaler, in his book "A revised date for Pentateuchal texts?" published in 2002, dates the amulets somewhat earlier than the other artifacts in the cave (725-650 BCE).

Archaeology

The work of the American school of biblical archaeologists such as William F. Albright and Cyrus Gordon have confirmed that Genesis and Exodus are firmly grounded in the material reality of the second millennium. The Torah accurately portrays second-millennium legal and social customs. An example of this how the price of 20 shekels price for Joseph was the going price for a slave during the first half of the 2nd millennium, whereas in the 2nd half of that millennium the price had gone up to 30 shekels. The legal and cultural patterns present in the Patriarchal narratives simply no longer existed in exilic or post-exilic times. Furthermore, the customs manifested by Abraham & the patriarchs that descend from him are most closely matched by the society illustrated in the Nuzi tablets (of a Hurrian background peoples), dated in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC.

Furthermore, for those who doubt the historicity of the Exodus completely, by suggesting that it was created only in the sixth to fifth century B.C.E. post-exilic era, a question must be asked regarding

Ramesses and Pithom, the cities on which the Hebrews labored, according to Exodus. Why did the biblical editors or redactors refer specifically to Ramesses, when in their own era and for some three centuries earlier the capital of Egypt had been Tanis, a city well known and often referred to in the Old Testament? From the Book of Judges onwards, Tanis is consistently referred to as Egypt's capital. Why would a biblical editor insert Ramesses into a newly composed story when that city no longer existed in Egypt and had not been Pharaoh's residence or the capital for the previous four or five centuries? ...Tanis had been the Egyptian capital throughout nearly the entire span of Israel's monarchic period. What sense would it make for Jews familiar with Saite Egypt to invent a story about an oppressive pharaoh who had compelled their ancestors to labor on his cities, and why fix on Ramesses for this role? In Dynasty XXVI Pharaoh's capital was Sais, and even more pointedly, Jewish exiles in Egypt were valued for their mercenary skills and not consigned to compulsory brick making.

Other

There is a trend among scholars to view the Pentateuch as a literary unit again. Scholars are admitting that the way the books use common words, phrases and motifs, parallel narrative structure, and deliberate theological arrangement of literary units for teaching and memorization support viewing the five books as a literary whole.

The Documentary Hypotheses – an overview

The documentary hypothesis (DH) proposes that the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, known collectively as the Torah or Pentateuch), represent a combination of documents from four originally independent sources. According to the influential version of the hypothesis formulated by Julius Wellhausen (1844 - 1918) these sources and the approximate dates of their composition were:

- the J, or Jahwist, source; written c. 950 BC in the southern kingdom of Judah. (The name Yahweh begins with a J in Wellhausen's native German.)
- the E, or Elohist, source; written c. 850 BC in the northern kingdom of Israel.
- the D, or Deuteronomist, source; written c. 621 BC in Jerusalem during a period of religious reform.
- the P, or Priestly, source; written c. 450 BC by Aaronid priests.
- The editor who combined the sources into the final Pentateuch is known as R, for Redactor, and might have been Ezra.

"Starting from the simple question of how to reconcile inconsistencies in the text, and refusing to accept forced explanations to harmonize them, scholars eventually arrived at the theory that the Torah was composed of selections woven together from several, at times inconsistent, sources dealing with the same and related subjects. The reasoning followed in this kind of analysis is somewhat similar to that of the Talmudic sages and later rabbis who held that inconsistent clauses and terminology in a single paragraph of the Mishna must have originated with different sages, and who recognized that Moses could not have written passages of the Torah that contain information unavailable to him, such as the last chapter of Deuteronomy, which describes his death and its aftermath." (Jeffrey Tigay, JPS Torah Commentary on Deuteronomy)

According to Wellhausen, the four sources present a picture of Israel's religious history, which he saw as one of ever-increasing centralization and priestly power. Wellhausen's hypothesis became the dominant view on the origin of the Pentateuch for much of the 20th century. Most contemporary Bible experts accept some form of the documentary hypothesis, and scholars continue to draw on Wellhausen's terminology and insights.

Composition of the Torah

Following Wellhausen, scholars speak of four major sources for the Torah.

J, Jahwist source

The oldest source, concerned with narratives, making up half of Genesis and the first half of Exodus, plus fragments of Numbers. J describes a human-like God, called Yahweh (or rather YHWH) throughout, and has a special interest in the territory of the Kingdom of Judah and individuals connected with its history. J has an eloquent style. Originally composed c. 950 BC.

E, Elohist source

E parallels J, often duplicating the narratives. Makes up a third of Genesis and the first half of Exodus, plus fragments of Numbers. E describes a human-like God initially called Elohim, and Yahweh subsequent to the incident of the burning bush, at which Elohim reveals himself as Yahweh. E focuses on the Kingdom of Israel and on the Shiloh priesthood, has a moderately eloquent style. Originally composed c. 850 BC.

D, Deuteronomist source

D takes the form of a series of sermons about the Law, and consists of most of Deuteronomy. Its distinctive term for God is YHWH Elohainu, translated in English as "The Lord our God." Originally composed c. 650-621 BCE.

P, Priestly source

Preoccupied with the centrality of the priesthood, and with lists (especially genealogies), dates, numbers and laws. P describes a distant and unmerciful God, referred to as Elohim. P partly duplicates J and E, but alters details to stress the importance of the priesthood. P consists of about a fifth of Genesis, substantial portions of Exodus and Numbers, and almost all of Leviticus. P has a low level of literary style. Composed c. 550-400 BC.

Composition

The redaction of the Torah began with the combination of J and E to create JE, c 750. The addition of D created JED. The redactors associated with P put the work into its final form c 400.

Before Wellhausen

Mosaic authorship

Prior to the 17th century both Jews and Christians accepted the traditional view that Moses had written down the Torah under the direct inspiration—even dictation—of God. A few rabbis and philosophers asked how Moses could have described his own death, or given a list of the kings of Edom before those kings ever lived, but none doubted the truth of the tradition, for the purpose of scholarship was to underline the antiquity and authority of the teaching in the Pentateuch, not to demonstrate who wrote the books.

The beginnings of the documentary hypothesis

In 1651 Thomas Hobbes, in chapter 33 of *Leviathan*, marshaled a battery of evidence that the Pentateuch could not all be by Moses, noting passages such as Deut 34:6 ("no man knoweth of his sepulchre to this day," implying an author living long after Moses' death); Gen 12:6 ("and the Canaanite was then in the land," implying an author living in a time when the Canaanite was no longer in the land); and Num 21:14 (referring to a previous book of Moses' deeds), and concluded that none of these could be by Moses. Others, including Isaac de la Peyrère, Baruch Spinoza, Richard Simon, and John Hampden came to the same conclusion, but their works were condemned, several of them were imprisoned and forced to recant, and an attempt was made on Spinoza's life.

In 1753 Jean Astruc printed (anonymously) *Conjectures sur les memoires originaux, dont il parait que Moses s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Genèse* ("Conjectures on the original accounts

of which it appears Moses availed himself in composing the Book of Genesis"). Astruc's motive was to refute Hobbes and Spinoza - "the sickness of the last century," as he called their work. To do this, he applied to Genesis the tools of literary analysis which scholars were already using with Classical texts such as the Iliad to sift variant traditions and arrive at the most authentic text. He began by identifying two markers which seemed to identify consistent variations, the use of "Elohim" or "YHWH" (Yahweh) as the name for God, and the appearance of duplicated stories, or doublets, such as the two accounts of the creation in the first and second chapters of Genesis and the two accounts of Sarah and a foreign king (Gen.12 and Gen.20). He then ruled columns and assigned verses to these, the "Elohim" verses in one column, the "YHWH" verses in another, and the members of the doublets in their own columns beside these. The four parallel columns thus constructed contained two long narratives and two short ones. Astruc suggested that these were the original documents used by Moses, and that Genesis as written by Moses had looked just like this, four parallel accounts meant to be read separately. According to Astruc, a later editor had combined the four columns into a single narrative, creating the confusions and repetitions noted by Hobbes and Spinoza.

The tools adapted by Astruc for biblical source criticism were vastly developed by subsequent scholars, most of them German. From 1780 onwards Johann Gottfried Eichhorn extended Astruc's analysis beyond Genesis to the entire Pentateuch, and by 1823 he had concluded that Moses had had no part in writing any of it. In 1805 Wilhelm de Wette concluded that Deuteronomy represented a third independent source. About 1822 Friedrich Bleek identified Joshua as a continuation of the Pentateuch via Deuteronomy, while others identified signs of the Deuteronomist in Judges, Samuel, and Kings. In 1853 Hermann Hupfeld suggested that the Elohist was really two sources and should be split, thus isolating the Priestly source; Hupfeld also emphasized the importance of the Redactor, or final editor, in producing the Torah from the four sources. Not all the Pentateuch was traced to one or other of the four sources: numerous smaller sections were identified, such as the Holiness Code contained in Leviticus 17 to 26.

Scholars also attempted to identify the sequence and dates of the four sources, and to propose who might have produced them, and why. De Wette had concluded in 1805 that none of the Pentateuch was composed before the time of David; Since Spinoza, D was connected with the priests of the Temple in Jerusalem during the reign of Josiah in 621 BC; beyond this, scholars argued variously for composition in the order PEJD, or EJDP, or JEDP: the subject was far from settled.

The Wellhausen (or Graf-Wellhausen) hypothesis

In 1876/77 Julius Wellhausen published *Die Komposition des Hexateuch* ("The Composition of the Hexateuch"), in which he set out the four-source hypothesis of Pentateuchal origins; this was followed in 1878 by *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* ("Prolegomena to the History of Israel"), a work which traced the development of the religion of the ancient Israelites from an entirely secular, non-supernatural standpoint. Wellhausen contributed little that was new, but sifted and combined the previous century of scholarship into a coherent, comprehensive theory on the origins of the Torah and of Judaism, one so persuasive that it dominated scholarly debate on the subject for the next hundred years.

Distinguishing the sources

Wellhausen's criteria for distinguishing between sources were those developed by his predecessors over the previous century: style (including but not exclusively the choice of vocabulary), divine names, and doublets (and occasionally triplets). J was identified with a rich narrative style, E was somewhat less eloquent, P's language was dry and legalistic. Vocabulary items such as the names of God, or the use of Horeb (E and D) or Sinai (J and P) for God's mountain; ritual objects such as the ark, mentioned frequently in J but never in E; the status of judges (never mentioned in P) and prophets (mentioned only in E and D); the means of communication between God and man (J's God meets in

person with Adam and Abraham, E's God communicates through dreams, P's can only be approached through the priesthood): all these and more formed the toolkit for discriminating between sources and allocating verses to them.

Dating the sources

Wellhausen's starting point for dating the sources was the event described in 2 Kings 22:8-20: a "scroll of Torah" (which can be translated "instruction" or "law") is discovered in the Temple in Jerusalem by the High Priest Hilkiah in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, who had ascended the throne as a child of eight. What Josiah reads there causes him to embark on a campaign of religious reform, destroying all altars except that in the Temple, prohibiting all sacrifice except at the Temple, and insisting on the exclusive worship of Yahweh. In the 4th century Jerome had speculated that the scroll may have been Deuteronomy; de Wette in 1805 suggested that it might have been only the law-code at Deuteronomy 12-26 that Hilkiah found, and that he might have written it himself, alone or in collaboration with Josiah. The Deuteronomistic historian certainly held Josiah in high regard: 1 Kings 13 names him as one who will be sent by Yahweh to slaughter the apostate priests of Beth-el, in a prophecy allegedly made 300 years before his birth.

With D anchored in history, Wellhausen proceeded to place the remaining sources around it. He accepted Karl Heinrich Graf's conclusion that the sources were written in the order J-E-D-P. This was contrary to the general opinion of scholars at the time, who saw P as the earliest of the sources, "the official guide to approved divine worship", and Wellhausen's sustained argument for a late P was the great innovation of the Prolegomena. J and E he ascribed to the early monarchy, approximately 950 BCE for J and 850 BCE for E; P he placed in the early Persian post-Exilic period, around 500 BCE. His argument for these dates was based on what was seen in his day as the natural evolution of religious practice: in the pre-and early monarchic society described in Genesis and Judges and Samuel, altars were erected wherever the Patriarchs or heroes such as Joshua chose, anyone could offer the sacrifice, and portions were offered to priests as the one offering the sacrifice chose; by the late monarchy sacrifice was beginning to be centralized and controlled by the priesthood, while pan-Israelite festivals such as Passover were instituted to tie the people to the monarch in a joint celebration of national history; in post-Exilic times the temple in Jerusalem was firmly established as the only sanctuary, only the descendants of Aaron could offer sacrifices, festivals were linked to the calendar instead of to the seasons, and the schedule of priestly entitlements was strictly mandated.

The four were combined by a series of Redactors (editors), first J with E to form a combined JE, then JE with D to form a JED text, and finally JED with P to form JEDP, the final Torah. Taking up a scholarly tradition stretching back to Spinoza and Hobbes, Wellhausen named Ezra, the post-Exilic leader who re-established the Jewish community in Jerusalem at the behest of the Persian emperor Cyrus, as the final redactor

After Wellhausen

For much of the 20th century Wellhausen's hypothesis formed the framework within which the origins of the Pentateuch were discussed, and even the Vatican, a staunch critic of secular biblical scholarship in the 19th century, came to accept the methods, if not the findings, of source and form criticism. Some important modifications were introduced, notably by Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth, who argued for the oral transmission of ancient core beliefs - guidance out of Egypt, conquest of the Promised Land, covenants, revelation at Sinai/Horeb, etc. Simultaneously, the work of the American school of biblical archaeologists such as William F. Albright and Cyrus Gordon seemed to confirm that even if Genesis and Exodus were only given their final form in the first millennium BC, they were still firmly grounded in the material reality of the second millennium. The overall effect of such refinements was to aid the wider acceptance of the basic hypothesis, by reassuring believers that even if the final form of the Pentateuch was not due to Moses himself, and "despite the late date of the Pentateuch, we

can nevertheless recover a credible picture of the period of Moses and even of the patriarchal age. Hence opposition to the documentary hypothesis gradually waned, and by the mid-twentieth century it was almost universally accepted."

The collapse of the consensus began in the late 1960s, with the spread of new scholarly tools and a growing recognition of the limitations of Wellhausen's analytical framework. The result has been proposals which modify the documentary model so far as to become unrecognizable, or even abandon it entirely in favour of alternative models which see the Pentateuch as the product of a single author, or as the end-point of a process of creation by the entire community. Thus, to mention some of the major figures from the last decades of the 20th century, H. H. Schmid almost completely eliminated J, allowing only a late Deuteronomical redactor; Rolf Rendtorff and Erhard Blum saw the Pentateuch developing from the gradual accretion of small units into larger and larger works, a process which removes both J and E, and, significantly, implied a supplemental rather than a documentary model for Old Testament origins; and John Van Seters, using a similar model, envisaged an ongoing process of supplementation in which later authors modified earlier compositions and changed the focus of the narratives. With the idea of identifiable sources disappearing, the question of dating also changes its terms. The most radical contemporary proposal has come from Thomas L. Thompson, who suggests that the final redaction of the Torah occurred as late as the early Hasmonean monarchy.

The challenge to the Wellhausen consensus was perhaps best summed up by R. N. Whybray, who pointed out that of the various possible models for the composition of the Pentateuch - documentary, supplemental and fragmentary - the documentary was the most difficult to demonstrate, for while the supplemental and fragmentary models propose relatively simple, logical processes and can account for the unevenness of the final text, the process envisaged by the DH is both complex and extremely specific in its assumptions about ancient Israel and the development of its religion. Whybray went on to assert that these assumptions were illogical and contradictory, and did not offer real explanatory power: why, for example, should the authors of the separate sources avoid duplication, while the final redactor accepted it? "Thus the hypothesis can only be maintained on the assumption that, while consistency was the hallmark of the various [source] documents, inconsistency was the hallmark of the redactors!"

Richard Elliott Friedman's "Who Wrote the Bible?" (1987) and "The Bible with Sources Revealed" (2003) were in essence an extended response to Whybray, explaining, in terms based on the history of ancient Israel, how the redactors could have tolerated inconsistency, contradiction and repetition, indeed had it forced upon them by the historical setting in which they worked. Friedman's classic four-source division differed from Wellhausen in accepting Yehezkel Kaufmann's dating of P to the reign of Hezekiah; this in itself is no small modification of Wellhausen, for whom a late dating of P was essential to his model of the historical development of Israelite religion. Friedman argued that J appeared a little before 722 BCE, followed by E, and a combined JE soon after that. P was written as a rebuttal of JE (c. 715-687 BCE), and D was the last to appear, at the time of Josiah (c. 622 BCE), before the Redactor, whom Friedman identifies as Ezra, collated the final Torah.

Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien's "Sources of the Pentateuch" subsequently presented the Pentateuchal text sorted into continuous sources following the divisions of Martin Noth. But while the terminology and insights of the documentary hypothesis continue to inform scholarly debate about the origins of the Pentateuch, it no longer dominates that debate as it did for the first two thirds of the 20th century.