

## The Documentary Hypothesis

Duane A. Garretta

The time has long passed for scholars of every theological persuasion to recognize that the Graf-Wellhausen theory, as a starting point for continued research, is dead. The Documentary Hypothesis and the arguments that support it have been effectively demolished by scholars from many different theological perspectives and areas of expertise. Even so, the ghost of Wellhausen hovers over Old Testament studies and symposiums like a thick fog, adding nothing of substance but effectively obscuring vision. Although actually incompatible with form-critical and archaeology-based studies, the Documentary Hypothesis has managed to remain the mainstay of critical orthodoxy. One wonders if we will ever return to the day when discussions of Genesis will not be stilted by interminable references to P and J. There are indications that such a day is coming. Many scholars are exploring the inadequacies of the Documentary Hypothesis and looking toward new models for explaining the Pentateuch.

### The History and Salient Points of the Documentary Hypothesis

The Documentary Hypothesis began when Jean Astruc (1684–1766) came to believe that he could uncover the sources of the Pentateuch by using the divine names *Yahweh* and *Elohim* as a guide. He placed passages that use the name *Elohim* in one column (A), those that use *Yahweh* in another (B), and passages with “repetitions” (C) and interpolations (D) in a third and a fourth column. From this simple, if not facile, beginning originated the road to the Documentary Hypothesis. Along the way came a “fragmentary hypothesis” (which asserts that the Pentateuch was compiled from a mass of fragmentary sources) and a “supplemental hypothesis” (which asserts that a single, unified document lies at the core of the Pentateuch, but that many fragmentary sources have been added to it). But the triumphant theory of Pentateuchal origins was the Documentary Hypothesis, often called the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis after the

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two men, K.H. Graf and Julius Wellhausen, who gave it its classic expression.

The theory, in its most basic form, is easy enough to grasp: Behind the Pentateuch are four source documents, called J (Yahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), and P (Priestly Code).

J, the oldest, begins at Genesis 2:4b and includes large portions of Genesis as well as portions of Exodus and Numbers and a few short texts in Deuteronomy. It may be dated to the early monarchy (Solomonic?) period. In Genesis, J refers to God as *Yahweh*, for, according to the hypothesis, people ...

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