

# The traditional “Documentary Hypothesis” of how the first books of the Bible came to be

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**The “problem”:** Apparent inconsistencies and contradictions of language, plot and characterization within the text of Genesis

**The solution:** Imagine multiple authors and editors, each writing in their own times and contexts for their own purposes. The basic hypothesis is:

OLDEST: oral traditions from unknown times.

“YAHWIST” (J): a supposed source from the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE “Solomonic Enlightenment” in Jerusalem, Judah.

*Characteristic elements of “J” include*

1. The use of Hebrew, “YHWH” (often rendered “LORD” in all caps in English translation) for the name of God.
2. The character of YHWH is immediate, engaged, and often emotional (example: the Garden of Eden story in Gen 2-3)

“ELOHIST” (E): a supposed 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE source from the northern kingdom of Israel, providing local variations on the older “J” stories.

*Characteristic elements of “E” include*

1. Emphasis on “Israelite” locales and concerns (in contrast with “Judahite”)
2. Repetition of “earlier” stories (e.g., the “wife-sister” stories in Genesis 12 and 20)

“PRIESTLY” (P): a supposed 6<sup>th</sup> century source from former Judahite temple priests now exiled in Babylon.

*Characteristic elements of “P” include*

1. The use of Hebrew *‘elohim* rather than YHWH for the name of God.
2. The character of God is transcendent and in control (e.g., the Creation story in Gen 1.1-2.4a)

“DEUTERONOMIST” (D): a supposed source ranging across the time of the Jerusalem monarchy. Barely relevant for Genesis itself.