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or by titles such as God Almighty (*el shadday*; see further pages 90–91), but it was not until the time of Moses that the divine name Yahweh was revealed: “God [*elohim*] spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am the LORD [*yahweh*]. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty [*el shadday*], but by my name “The LORD [*yahweh*]” I did not make myself known to them’” (Ex 6.2–3). In the E source, the revelation of God’s personal name Yahweh is also set in the time of Moses:

Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God [*elohim*] said to Moses . . . “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD [*yahweh*], the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,
and this is my title for all generations.”
(Ex 3.13–15)

This inconsistency about whether God was known as Yahweh before the time of Moses made it possible to isolate different sources in Genesis. Then other characteristics of the sources could be identified apart from which divine name they used, and they could be further differentiated in the last four books of the Pentateuch, where they all regularly use Yahweh.

Here we will summarize some of the main characteristics of each source. More detailed discussion will be found in the chapters that follow.

J

The J, or Yahwist, source, is identified in Genesis first by its consistent use of the divine name Yahweh (spelled *Jahwe* in German; hence “J”). In the passages where that name is used, Yahweh is described with vivid anthropomorphisms, that is, in very humanlike ways. Thus, as we have seen, in the narrative of the garden of Eden (Gen 2.4b–3.24), he forms the first human from clay like a potter and breathes life into him; he walks in the garden; and he makes clothes for the man and the woman. In subsequent J passages, he shuts the door of the ark after all have boarded (Gen 7.16); he smells the odor of the sacrifice that Noah offers after the Flood (8.21); he goes down to

view the tower of Babel (11.5); he visits Abraham for a meal (18.1–8) and bargains directly with him (18.22–33); and he meets Moses and tries to kill him (Ex 4.24).

In J, the geographical location of many of the narratives concerning the ancestors of Israel (Gen 12–50) is in the territory of Judah, which was the dominant southern tribe and later the name of the kingdom ruled by the dynasty founded by David. Jacob’s son Judah, the ancestor of the tribe that bears his name, also features prominently in the ancestral narratives in J.

In J, the father-in-law of Moses is named Reuel (Ex 2.18), and the mountain on which Moses receives the law is called by its familiar name, Sinai (Ex 19.18).

The J source has a principal theme of a threefold promise to Abraham of land, descendants, and blessing. The boundaries of the Promised Land in J, “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen 15.18), roughly define the territory controlled by David and Solomon, kings of Israel in the tenth century BCE. This is one of the reasons that many scholars date J to the tenth century BCE, although others opt for a ninth-century date (as did Wellhausen), and others prefer still later dates. In this book, we will assume a tenth-century date.

The J source is the fullest of the four sources; when isolated from the others, it can be read as a fairly continuous narrative.

E

The E, or Elohist, source gets its name from its consistent use of the divine title *elohim* (“God”) in Genesis and until the revelation of the name Yahweh to Moses in Exodus 3. Because the original version of E was truncated when it was combined with J (see pages 55–56), E is fragmentary throughout the Pentateuch. It may begin as early as Genesis 15, and there is general agreement that it occurs from Genesis 20 onward.

In E, the deity is more remote than in J, typically revealing himself indirectly, through dreams (for example, Gen 20.3; 28.12), divine messengers (“angels”; Gen 21.17; 22.11; Ex 3.2), and prophets. The use of the term “prophet” is characteristic of E; only in E is Abraham called a prophet (Gen 20.7), and the

BOX 4.1 THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS AT WORK

According to the Documentary Hypothesis, in this passage from the beginning of the Flood story in Genesis 6–7, there are two sources, J (plain text) and P (in italics).

⁶ *The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.* ⁶ And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” ⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

⁹ *These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.* ¹⁰ *And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*

¹¹ *Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.* ¹² *And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.* ¹³ *And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.* ¹⁴ *Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.* ¹⁵ *This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits.* ¹⁶ *Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.* ¹⁷ *For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die.* ¹⁸ *But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.* ¹⁹ *And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.* ²⁰ *Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive.* ²¹ *Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.”* ²² *Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.*

⁷ *Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation.* ² *Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate;* ³ *and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth.* ⁴ *For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.* ⁵ *And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.*

⁶ *Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the earth.* ⁷ *And Noah with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood.* ⁸ *Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground,* ⁹ *two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah.* ¹⁰ *And after seven days the waters of the flood came on the earth.*

¹¹ *In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.* ¹² *The rain fell on the*

continued

BOX 4.I *continued*

earth forty days and forty nights.¹³On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark,¹⁴they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind—every bird, every winged creature.¹⁵They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life.¹⁶And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.¹⁸The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters.¹⁹The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered;²⁰the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.²¹And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings;²²everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.²³He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark.²⁴And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days.

same is true of Miriam (Ex 15.20; see also Numbers 11.29; 12.6).

In E, the mountain of revelation to Moses is called Horeb (Ex 3.1; 33.6), and Moses's father-in-law is named Jethro (Ex 3.1; 18.1).

In Genesis 12–50, the geographical setting of E narratives is often in the northern part of Israel, which from the late tenth to the late eighth century BCE was a separate kingdom, somewhat confusingly also called Israel. In poetic texts, this northern kingdom is often named for its dominant tribe, Ephraim, and so E is focused on Ephraim as J is focused on Judah (a coincidence that may serve as an additional memory aid). This focus on the north, and also the emphasis on prophecy, suggests that E originated in the northern kingdom, probably in the ninth century, but perhaps in the eighth (the date given by Wellhausen).

Because of its fragmentary nature, some scholars have questioned whether E actually existed as a separate source. Others prefer simply to speak of JE,

recognizing that while there probably were originally distinct sources, they cannot easily be separated.

¶ D

The D, or Deuteronomic, source is found entirely, or almost entirely, in the book of Deuteronomy. According to a scholarly consensus developed in the nineteenth century by Wellhausen's predecessors, the core of Deuteronomy is the book that was discovered in the Temple during the reign of Josiah, the king of Judah, in the late seventh century BCE (see 2 Kings 22.8). As we will see, Deuteronomy has its own complicated history, and it certainly makes use of traditions that are older than the seventh century. There are some connections between D and E; like E, D uses Horeb (Deut 1.2; 5.2) as the name of the mountain of revelation rather than Sinai, and D also emphasizes prophecy (Deut 13.1–5; 18.15–22). Like E, it probably also originated in the northern kingdom of Israel. (For further discussion of the particulars of D, and

the Deuteronomic school for which it was a primary text, see pages 178–88.)

¶ P

The P, or Priestly, source is so named because of its emphasis on matters of religious observance and ritual. Thus, in Genesis, the first account of creation, which is P, concludes with the account of divine rest and hence of the sabbath observance (Gen 2.2–3). P is also concerned with details of dietary law (for example, Gen 9.4–6), and, in the ancestral narratives, the command to Abraham to practice circumcision appears in P (Gen 17.9–14).

In P, as in E, the deity is often called *elohim* until the revelation of the divine name to Moses (Ex 6.2–3). Unlike E, however, P preserves other designations of the deity, such as *el shadday* and other combinations with *el*; we will discuss these further on pages 90–91. In P, the deity is even more remote and transcendent than in the other sources, never appearing directly, as in J, or even indirectly through dreams and messengers, as in E. For P, especially beginning in Exodus, the deity is typically manifest in his “glory.” This is a concrete image that means a light-filled cloud that both indirectly reveals the divine presence and simultaneously conceals it, like the sun behind a cloud in the sky.

While J has a covenant with Abraham (Gen 15.18–21), and J and E also describe the covenant at Sinai/Horeb, in P a thematic series of covenants occurs. The first is the covenant with Noah and his descendants, whose sign is the bow in the sky (Gen 9.12–17). The second is the covenant with Abraham, whose sign is circumcision (Gen 17.11). The third is the covenant between God and Israel, whose sign is the sabbath (Ex 31.12–17); this covenant is mediated by Moses on Mount Sinai, which is P’s name for the mountain of revelation.

Because P was the final editor of the already existing sources, the first chapter of the Pentateuch (Gen 1) is P, and its last chapter (Deut 34) is also largely P; P has thus framed the Torah. In Genesis, P connects the J and E narratives by an elaborate system of genealogies, beginning, as we have seen, with the “generations of the heavens and the earth” (Gen 2.4).

While there are some narrative passages in P, the most important P sections are not narrative, but divinely given instructions concerning various matters of ritual and religious observance, especially in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Much of this material was not original with the Priestly writers but was derived from the traditions of the Temple in Jerusalem where the Priestly school had its origins. Thus P has lengthy descriptions of priestly vestments and sacred architecture and objects and detailed regulations concerning ritual purity and holy days. The sacrificial system was especially important to P, and because Moses and his brother Aaron, the first Israelite priest, are central to P’s schematic presentation of the early history of Israel, P contains no sacrifices before the time of Moses.

Characteristic P phrases include “male and female” (in the case of animals translated “the male and his mate,” although the Hebrew makes no such distinction) and “be fruitful and multiply.”

The date of P is debated, although one stage in its development was during the sixth century BCE, as part of an effort to preserve and consolidate traditions in the wake of the destruction of the Temple and the exile to Babylon. The position adopted in this book is that the substantial formation of P occurred in the sixth century BCE.

The Formation of the Pentateuch

A description of the process by which the separate sources or documents were combined is also hypothetical, but a possible scenario is as follows. Using some earlier traditions, and reflecting their own perspectives as well, J and E were written independently, the former in Judah, probably during the tenth century BCE, and the latter in the northern kingdom of Israel in the ninth, or perhaps a century or so later. When the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BCE, refugees from there brought with them to Jerusalem the E source, which was combined with J in Jerusalem, but in such a way that while J remained intact, E