

# Chapter 5

## The Epic Authors

### An Introduction to the Documentary Hypothesis

Anyone reading the Bible becomes aware that it contains duplicate stories and some internal contradictions. There are two creation stories: in the first God creates the heavens and the earth in six days; in the second (Genesis 2:4b onwards) the Lord God made the earth and the heavens in one day. There are two stories of God's covenant with Abraham, two stories of Abraham passing off his wife as his sister; two stories of Abraham throwing out Hagar and her son into the wilderness; two stories of Moses getting water at Meribah, and many more doubles and even some triples. Then there are the inconsistencies. For example, in the Noah story, did God tell Noah to take 'two of every kind' into the ark (Genesis 6:20) or did the Lord tell him to take 'seven pairs of clean animals... and a pair of the animals that were not clean' (Genesis 7:2)? In the Joseph story, was Joseph sold to Ishmaelites (Genesis 27:25) or to Midianites (Genesis 27:28)? There are even outright contradictions. Perhaps the most significant of these is the divine statement in Exodus 3: 6 that the name Yahweh was not revealed to the Patriarchs - in direct contradiction to the many instances in which the Patriarchs used that very name. For example, Abram 'invoked the name Yahweh' on returning to Canaan (Genesis 13:4), Isaac did so at Beersheba (Genesis 26:25) and Yahweh reveals himself to Jacob at Bethel saying "I am Yahweh", and there are many others.

The resolution to these problems came with the recognition that the first five books of the Bible have come about as the result of weaving together several different earlier texts. These texts can be separated out because of their distinct characteristics, most notably their different choices for the name of the deity. Starting from this point, more extensive differences in vocabulary, style and beliefs can be seen as associated with the different sources – differences that have been used by scholars to unravel the separate individual texts. Evidence for the success of these efforts comes from the fact that, when so separated, the individual texts: -

- contain no duplicates
- contain no internal contradictions
- are themselves to a high degree coherent continuous texts
- express consistent points of view

Furthermore the separation into the main sources in many instances improves the continuity of the narrative. In the bible as we have it today, with the texts merged together, the insertion of one text often interrupts the narrative flow of another. For example, in the opening of the incident in which Phinehas kills an Israelite man and a Midianite woman with a single spear thrust (Numbers 25:6) it says that the people were gathered together in mourning. In mourning for whom? The answer lies in Numbers 21:29 where, in the immediately preceding text by the same author, it states that the people were mourning for Aaron. The insertion of a whole series of other stories in Numbers 21 to 25:5 completely obscures this point. Other examples of the same phenomena will be noted as the individual source texts are reviewed in the following chapters.

The 'Documentary Hypothesis', as this idea is called, identifies four main sources. These are known as: -

The Elohist

A source who used Elohim (usually translated as 'God') as the name of the divinity until Yahweh revealed this name to Moses on the holy mountain. The Elohist emphasised the contribution made by the ancestors of the Northern tribes and events of special interest to the Northern tradition. His principal hero was Moses. His theology emphasised the 'fear of God' and obedience to the covenant of Moses. His text ran from the covenant with Abraham to the death of

Moses<sup>1</sup>. He believed that God spoke directly only to Moses, communicating with all others by means of dreams and visions. The Elohist probably wrote before the time of the destruction of Israel by Assyria in 722 BCE. This is the source known as E.

#### The Yahwist

A source who used Yahweh, traditionally translated as ‘the LORD’, as the name of god throughout. The Yahwist emphasised people and events of special interest to Judeans. The text ran from the second creation story at least as far as the death of Moses, though there is reasonable evidence that it continued to the accession of Solomon. The Yahwist believed that Yahweh can speak to ordinary people directly or through angels – dreams and visions were not required. Its author was more interested in telling a good story than in describing religious ritual or listing secular laws. or even in presenting a respectful view of the founder of the Davidic dynasty. This author was therefore unlikely to have been either a priest or a courtier. The Yahwist’s theology emphasised both the justice and the mercy of Yahweh. The text was probably written down in the late eighth century BCE and is known as the J source (following the German spelling of ‘Jahweh’).

#### The Priestly authors

These are sources who also used Elohim as the principal name of God prior to the revelation of the name Yahweh to Moses in Egypt. They were written from the viewpoint of the Jerusalem priesthood. These texts are the source for all of Leviticus and they make contributions to Genesis, Exodus and Numbers. There are probably two major contributors, the main one known as P and another known as H who provided the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17-26 and a few editorial insertions elsewhere. Their work probably stretched from the first creation story to the settlement of the Land<sup>2</sup>. They incorporated a great deal of material concerning religious ritual and law, some of which can be seen to have evolved over a period of time prior to being written down in its present form. Their text incorporated summaries of many of the Yahwist stories. The most likely time for the compilation of this material is the last years of the eighth century BCE or the early years of the seventh<sup>3</sup>. Both P and H were almost certainly priests of the Jerusalem temple.

#### The Deuteronomists

Some scholars hold that there was more than one Deuteronomist. Their contributions spanned the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Included amongst their number was the author of the book that was discovered, or rediscovered, around 622 – in King Josiah’s time – during the cleansing of the temple. The Deuteronomists are sometimes simply referred to as D. Whilst being responsible for most of the original material in Deuteronomy, their writings have not been found to any significant extent in any other book of the Pentateuch<sup>4</sup>. However, a

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<sup>1</sup> The Abraham covenant in Genesis 15:13-16 is assigned as the opening of the Elohist’s epic by Jenks and Speiser. Others claim that this text lacks sufficient clear indicators to justify any clear attribution.

<sup>2</sup> There is general consensus that it runs at least to the death of Moses; but there is also recognisably Priestly material in the book of Joshua which incorporates a description of the first celebration of Passover. The death of Aaron’s son Eleazar is thus an ending that includes the fulfilment of Yahweh’s promise. Some would argue that the author of Genesis 1, although priestly, was not the same priest who was responsible for the bulk of Leviticus.

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars argue that it was later, perhaps just before the exile, perhaps during it (586 to 520) or even shortly after. But there are difficulties with this view. The Deuteronomist knows some of Priestly material, and his book was re-discovered in 622 or thereabouts. The language and vocabulary predates the exile, so those who argue for a late date must also argue that it was deliberately written in an archaic style.

<sup>4</sup> Chapters 12 to 26 contain a collection of laws assembled over time. These may have inserted by a Deuteronomist, and were probably extensively edited by one, but they were not original creations of a

Deuteronomist (sometimes known as DH) is also held to have assembled and edited the material that now forms the core of the historical books from Joshua to Kings. This Deuteronomist worked initially in the reign of King Josiah just before the exile. But it is also clear that a final edition of the Deuteronomic History with appropriate revisions was prepared during the exile. As a result some scholars use Dtr1 to refer to the author responsible for the version written in Josiah's time and Dtr2 for the author who prepared the revised version in exile.

The Deuteronomists had access to the work of the Priestly authors; they argued against some aspects of their theology and did not accept the Aaronites exclusive claim to the Jerusalem priesthood. They had access to J, some of whose material may have been incorporated into their history. Their writings strongly influenced Jeremiah and were influenced by him. The purpose of the Deuteronomists was firstly to restate the nature of the contract between God and his people (Deuteronomy) and then to interpret the people's experience in the light of that contract (the Deuteronomic History). Their ideas and theology were influenced by the northern prophets, but the bulk of their writing took place in Judah well after the fall of Israel. Some of them were priests, but not of the Jerusalem temple. They probably included at least one professional scribe.

The texts associated with these sources were given the identifying letters (E, J, P & D etc) by the German theologians who initially worked out the Documentary Hypothesis. This hypothesis has been extensively developed since its inception in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It has survived a good deal of criticism, which continues to this day. The opponents<sup>5</sup> of the hypothesis argue:

- that any reasonably verbose text can be divided into separate coherent textual streams.
- that it is not surprising that the four alleged sources have different vocabularies when that has been the very means of their identification.
- that many of the apparent contradictions between the texts can be explained away (albeit with considerable ingenuity).
- that the duplicates all have some differences.
- that the recognition of the differences in style is too subjective to be allowable as evidence for separate authorship.
- that the differences in the underlying messages and emphases of the texts are either not real or not relevant.

But the proponents argue that the idea that texts separated on the basis their distinctive vocabularies would also *only by coincidence* eliminate the duplicates, be clear of contradictions, be continuous in themselves, use internally consistent but different stylistic devices and develop internally consistent but different emphases in content and message is hard to accept. That this could happen just by chance must have a vanishingly small probability.

Yet the hypothesis has its variants; some hold that the Yahwist, for example, was not a single author but a school of Yahwists. Scholars vary in their views as to the extent to which these works are assemblies of earlier material or original compositions. There continue to be ongoing debates about whether individual verses should be classified to this or to that source. Some scholars argue that there may have been a primary basic source that both the Elohist and the Yahwist used to create their versions. Disputes continue as to the ending of the Yahwist text and the beginning of the Elohist.

### **Recognition of the sources**

The easiest way to recognise the sources is from their styles. J's literary style is free flowing,

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Deuteronomist. They were a reworking of earlier material.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example Josh McDowell's "Evidence that demands a verdict" Volume 2 for a fairly extensive and concerted attack on the documentary hypothesis.

romantic, dramatic and witty, whereas P's is didactic, formulaic, precise and careful. E is plain and straightforward, lacking the didactic qualities of P or the literary qualities of J. D, being mostly confined to the book of Deuteronomy presents few recognition issues within the Pentateuch, whilst the characteristic language and concerns are clear indicators thereafter. Whilst most readers can readily distinguish the style of one author, they do so almost unconsciously, and therefore largely subjectively. For a more objective approach, the tools of critical analysis can be employed. When this is done, the main characteristics of the four principle sources can be fairly readily identified as follows:

#### The Priestly authors

The most distinctive of all the sources is P, the main author of Leviticus. This author was interested in the correct execution and understanding of the cult. Details of ritual, of cultic practices and their related laws tend to be P material even when they occur in the other books of the Torah. Thus the institution of the ritual of circumcision interrupts the story of the Patriarchs in Genesis 17, and the institution of the Passover interrupts the story of the plagues in Exodus 12. Similarly all the instructions for the tabernacle and its furnishing in Exodus 24 to 31 and the description of the execution of these instructions in Numbers 35 to 40 are Priestly texts. The tabernacle (*miskan*) was crucial to P who discussed it extensively – often in conjunction with the Tent (*ohel*), in complete contrast to J who never mentioned either artefact. In P, the Tabernacle and Tent were in the centre of the camp, whilst in E the Tent of Meeting was outside the camp. P was interested in precise numbers – sizes, ages, dates and counts. Any mention of counts (such as the census of Numbers 1 and 26) or of cubits (such as those associated with the Ark in Genesis 6), are likely to come from the P source. (The 'cubit' occurs 56 times in P but only 3 times in all the other sources.) P's didactic, almost pedantic style, led him to make use of lists. Even the opening description of God's creation of the heavens and the earth fits this pattern, with the events of creation listed in order and each assigned to their numbered day, with each day being enclosed within the same repeated formula. P is naturally keen on lists in the form of genealogies, but other authors use these too, with the result that they are often inconsistent with one another – further evidence for the Documentary Hypothesis.

P established that only Aaronites can offer sacrifices and incense to the deity. He did this in the lengthy accounts of the ordination of Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8-9) and in the story of the rebellion of Korah (Numbers 16). All accounts of sacrifices by non-Aaronites are not from this author. P promoted Aaron whenever he could; indeed P established Aaron not only as Moses' brother, but as his elder brother. P used the phrase 'Moses and Aaron' in contexts where plain 'Moses' would have sufficed. P held that God only communicated with the people through the Aaronite priesthood, and not through dreams and visions and certainly not directly. Anthropomorphisms, such as God walking in the garden or sewing up clothes, were an anathema to P.

The P source used 'Elohim' or 'El Shaddai' (often translated as 'almighty God') as the divine name until the name 'Yahweh' was revealed to Moses in Egypt (Exodus 6:2-3). Further aspects of P's special vocabulary are shown in his fondness for ideas and words such as 'the tabernacle', 'the congregation', 'the community', 'the glory of Yahweh' and 'holiness'. He used '*nasi*' as the word for 'prince' or 'chieftain', whilst other sources used '*sar*' (often translated as 'commander'). He was fond of phrases such as 'in that very day' and 'lengthen your days in the land', and he called on people to 'be fruitful and multiply'. In P, people did not die so much as 'expire' or 'give up the ghost' (*gava*); they were often 'gathered to their people'. The words for possession (*ahuzzah*) or property (*rekush*) are used by P, but never by J, E or D. In P the people often 'complained', but only once in the other sources. It was P who favoured describing the tribulations imposed upon the Egyptians as 'plagues' – out of 15 uses of the word, only one can be linked to a different source.

H has similar pre-occupations to P, although his special concern was the practices that were needed if the people were to be 'holy'. H is most easily recognisable by his delight in chiasmus – a literary device in which the subject matter is embedded in a particular repetitive form such as A, B, C, X, C', B', A' where A' repeats the idea of A, often in very similar words and B' repeats B and so on. Some of the structures can be quite elaborate. H is also fond of explanations (such as "*you shall be holy, because I am holy*") and uses a slightly different vocabulary to P. Although his main work is the Holiness code, traces of H can also be found in occasional comments on P material.

#### The Yahwist

The Yahwist wrote with the fluent style of a skilled story-teller. Whereas P was concerned with the cult, and E with the laws of Moses, the Yahwist was concerned to write a foundation story of Judah that was a great read. The Yahwist was concerned with the themes of the justice and mercy of Yahweh, and of the way the sins of the father were visited on the children. The themes of succession, of deception, of the relationships between fathers and sons, and of the rivalry between brothers run through this text. It contains all the sex and romance now found in the prose of the Pentateuch. The Yahwist has almost no interest in laws and ritual. The Yahwist did, however, have a special interest the lives of women – unusual in a male-dominated society. The heroes of this text came principally from Judah and the other southern tribes.

The Yahwist delighted in all forms of word-play – alliteration, puns, letter reversal and so on. The text made great use of speech to advance the action.

The Yahwist used the name Yahweh consistently throughout, even though this author states that it was not until after the birth of Lamech's sons that the name Yahweh came to be used. In J the Ark is an important symbol of faith; it is never mentioned in the Elohist text. Equally neither the Tent of Meeting nor the Tabernacle is mentioned in J, although the tent (*ohel*) is mentioned in E and both are exhaustively discussed in P. The Yahwist's vocabulary reflected the themes of the text. For instance, the particular interest of this author in the question of deceit was reflected in the associated vocabulary. Words and phrases such as 'foolish', 'his eyes were dim', 'with deception', 'why did you deceive me', 'spies' and 'conceal' occur only in this text and no-where else in the bible. The use of the phrase 'to know' in the 'biblical' sense of a man knowing a woman sexually occurs only in the J texts and nowhere else in the Pentateuch<sup>6</sup>. This author used a few trademark phrases not found elsewhere such as 'old, well along in days'. J's characters 'wash the feet' of their guests, and it was J who wrote of the 'kindness and faithfulness'<sup>7</sup> of Yahweh. Of all the Pentateuchal sources, it is only in this text that 'Sheol' is used as the name of the underworld.

#### The Elohist

The Elohist text was dominated by the life and achievements of Moses. Aaron, by contrast was treated as a blasphemer. Whilst in P the priesthood was reserved for the Aaronites alone, the Elohist associated it with the Levites generally. Whilst in J the heroes of the stories came from Judah, in E they were associated with the northern tribes.

E's style was less literary than J. Although he used word-play occasionally, there was not the fascination with words and puns that so delighted J. Nor did E make such extensive use of the spoken word; he made more use of narrative than speech to advance the plot. His style was episodic. He makes no attempt to connect together the stories of the patriarchs. Each Patriarchal story, although complete in itself, stands by itself.

The Elohist used 'Elohim' as the principal divine name until the name 'Yahweh' was revealed, which for him occurred when Moses was on the Holy Mountain prior to his return to Egypt (Exodus 3:13-15). This author also used the terms El Olam (usually translated as 'Everlasting God') and El Bethel (God of Bethel) when describing events in Beersheba and Bethel respectively. In E, the name of the Holy Mountain was Horeb, not Sinai. Moses father-in-law was always known as Jethro, never Reuel. Unlike J, he never mentioned the Ark of the Covenant; and although he does mention the 'Tent' (*ohel*) where Yahweh spoke with Moses, he does so on only three occasions<sup>8</sup>.

E had a straight-forward vocabulary; he avoided euphemisms. When he mentioned sexual intercourse, he generally stated that the men 'went into' their women where J would say that the man 'knew' or 'lay with' the woman. When people died, they just die; they are not 'gathered to their people'.

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<sup>6</sup> Outside the Pentateuch it only occurs in Ruth; but see the chapter on the Southern Epic for evidence that the author of Ruth and the Yahwist were the same person.

<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew is '*hosed v'emet*': '*hesed*' is often translated as steadfast love or loving kindness. Because it does not have an exact translation in English its rendering tends to vary with context. '*emet*' conveys the meaning truth as well as faithfulness.

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 33:7-11, Numbers 11:16-26 and Numbers 12:4-19. Some translations, such as the AV, confuse the situation by sometimes translation '*ohel*' by 'tent' and sometimes by 'tabernacle'. But in these passages the hebrew word is always '*ohel*'.

Although a priest, E writes simply of the ‘people’, unlike P who talks of the ‘congregation’. He used the word *sar* for commander or chief, never the word *nasi* - prince. In E’s account of the struggle with Pharaoh, it was never Aaron’s staff that was used; in his text; the only staff with special powers was that wielded by Moses. In E God only spoke to Moses directly: with all others, God communicated by means of dreams and visions. His straightforward approach means that his text is often more easily recognised by its content and by the fact that it contains none of the stylistic features of either P or J.

Apart from the last three verses, the Elohist text is all contained in today’s Genesis, Exodus and Numbers. It ends with the death of Moses and the commissioning of Joshua as successor.

### The Deuteronomists

The Deuteronomists combined Yahweh with Elohim by making considerable use of the phrase ‘Yahweh your Elohim’ or its equivalents<sup>9</sup>. Like the Elohist, they knew the holy mountain as Horeb, not Sinai.

Their writings could be dramatic in style – calling on all the people to observe the law in powerful and direct language. They called on the individual to ‘circumcise the foreskin of your heart’ and to love Yahweh your god ‘with all your heart and with all your soul’. They called upon the people to turn away from worshipping all ‘the host of heaven’, and instead to really ‘listen’ to Yahweh their god, to turn neither ‘to the right nor the left’, to be ‘strong and courageous’, and to ‘be careful’ and to ‘watch’ themselves<sup>10</sup>. When talking of the assembly of the people they used the word ‘*qahal*’, never ‘*edah*’. (By contrast, the only word used in Leviticus for a congregation was ‘*edah*’, never ‘*qahal*’). He referred to ‘the book of the law’ and the ‘commandments’ (*mitzvah*), ‘statutes’ (*choq*) and ‘judgements’ (*mishpat*) that ‘Yahweh your god’ had given. More than any other Pentateuchal sources, his writing and thinking were influenced by the experience of slavery in Egypt, reminding his readers of ‘the iron furnace’ of Egypt from which they escaped. He described Yahweh Elohim as the god who ‘brought you out of Egypt’. He justified the Sabbath by the need to give slaves a day of rest, reminding his reader that ‘you were a slave in the Land of Egypt’. Much of Deuteronomy was written as if it were an address spoken by Moses; and he often addressed his hearers in the singular – when he wrote ‘remember, you were a slave’ he spoke to the hearer as an individual, not as a nation.

### Other Contributors

There are other smaller, but uniquely recognisable sources. One was the Book of Generations which was split up and used by a later editor to separate the Cain and Abel story from the Noah stories and again to separate those stories from the Abraham cycle. Others are short passages that seem to have little to mark them out as part of any of the four main sources. A significant example of this is the story of the capture of Lot by a coalition of local ‘kings’ and his rescue by Abram<sup>11</sup> as discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Other examples are the ancient poems, such as “The Testament of Jacob”, quoted in Genesis 49 and “The Song of the Sea” in Exodus 15. There are also the “Five Commandments” of Exodus 20, the “Covenant Code” in Exodus 21-24 and the Balaam material of Numbers 22-24.

All the sources were woven together by one (or more) editors, generally known as R for Redactors, whose traces can occasionally be seen. Sometimes an editor introduced a new source with the phrase “These are the records of...”; sometimes a word will be added to reconcile otherwise problematic passages (such as the accounts of Abraham’s birthplace in Genesis 11 and 12); sometimes it is a clarifying detail, such as the list of those coming down to Egypt with Jacob or additional geographical notes during the wanderings in the wilderness. Because they are short, they can sometimes be difficult to recognise and experts can disagree, but the continuity and consistency of the main texts is usually improved by recognising these insertions. R’s addition to the combined text is relatively small.

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<sup>9</sup> This only applies to the text actually written or edited by the Deuteronomist. At the end of the book of Deuteronomy there are two ancient poems which use Yahweh as the main name for the deity. These books may have been quoted by the author or authors of Deuteronomy or appended by a later editor.

<sup>10</sup> The verb *shama* (listen/obey) is used 91 times in Deuteronomy and the verb *shamar* (keep/watch) is used 73 times.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 14

### The sources of the sources

Some scholars hold that E, J and P should be regarded more as compilers of traditional material than as authors of original texts. However, the extent of internal cross-referencing between stories, especially in J, suggests a more creative approach. The texts certainly did incorporate earlier material, most of which was oral<sup>12</sup>. Whilst the original style of this earlier material is sometimes still visible, it has usually been adapted in such a way as to make a satisfying artistic whole. Each author has imposed sufficient stylistic unity for the reader generally to be able to recognise the unifying writer.

Some of the sources used by these writers have already been identified. Many of the stories in the early chapters of Genesis have Mesopotamian, Hurrian, Canaanite or Egyptian antecedents. Perhaps these ancient myths and legends were widely known throughout the Ancient Near East.

It is, however, an inherent characteristic of oral inheritance that it will adapt to the needs of those who choose to adopt it. One crucial adaptation was to change a legend that had its origin amongst a society that believed in a whole pantheon of gods into one suitable for a society that believed in just one god. Whilst this was mostly successful in the bible stories we have today, the origins occasionally show through. In the early stories, the deity often seems to be speaking to a heavenly council. The council has been eliminated from the text, but the speech remains. In the first chapter of Genesis, God says “Let *us* create man in our image...” and later “*See*, the man has become like *one of us*...” Later still, when mankind built the city of Babel, Yahweh urged, “*Come, let us* go down and confuse their language...”.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most dramatic example of this polytheistic legacy occurs in Genesis 6 when “*the sons* of God saw that the daughters of men were fair...” and the children of that union became the ‘heroes of old’ – a characteristic myth associated with divine assemblies. Elsewhere in the bible, in the Book of Job, the ‘*sons of Elohim*’ are mentioned as ‘coming to present themselves before Yahweh’, and Psalm 82 opens by saying “*Elohim has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgement*”.

The god of the early part of Genesis has characteristics which are inconsistent with the theology of the developed religion. In Genesis, God lies to Adam when he says, concerning the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that “in the day you eat of it you will die”. This was not true – as subsequent passages in the story proved. Mesopotamian gods may choose to deceive mortals, but surely not the god of Isaiah. And later Yahweh drives Adam out of Eden to prevent him from becoming immortal<sup>14</sup> – another action that one might expect of a Mesopotamian god, who were always in a struggle to contain mankind. The god of Genesis has regrets and can be talked out of a planned action by the advice of his mortal servants. Thus God promises Noah never again to curse the ground or to kill all living things; he is persuaded by Abram not to destroy Sodom if there are even as few as ten righteous men; he is persuaded by Moses not to destroy the Israelites because of the damage that such an action would do to God’s reputation with the Egyptians.<sup>15</sup> In these cases the anthropomorphic ideas about divine beings that are characteristic of the Canaanite and Mesopotamian pantheons seem to have been carried forward into stories that have a proto-Israelite provenance.

When an aspect of the ‘message’ of a legend became socially unacceptable, then the story could be adapted to deal with this. Thus when it became unsatisfactory for Moses to have an Egyptian name, a Hebrew etymology was provided (out of the mouth of an Egyptian princess!).<sup>16</sup> And complete name changes could also be achieved; for example, Joseph’s most sympathetic brother could be Reuben in the Northern tradition, but Judah in the Southern tradition. Small modifications such as this caused some of the stories to spin off apparent duplicates.

In some instances, the origin of the myth was lost by the time the story came to be incorporated into the Epic texts. This seems to have occurred in the Patriarchal stories where the reason for the Hurrian custom of adopting a wife as a sister was clearly no longer understood. Perhaps as a result, imaginative

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<sup>12</sup>The Mesopotamian material in the early chapters of Genesis could be an exception. One version of the flood story, for example, appears to contain a translation of an earlier written version. But even this could be simply a record at a point in time of a story that was propagated orally.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:26,3:22 and 11:7

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 3:22

<sup>15</sup> Gen.8:21, 18:2-33 and Numbers 14:10b-20

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 2:10

explorations of the consequences of such confusion came to be developed. Here too the original divine names associated with the Hurrian myth have been replaced with the more acceptable Lot (the ‘Shining One’), Milkah (‘Queen’) and Sarai (‘Princess’) as the story was adopted into Israelite legend.

Many of the stories were based around shrines and answer questions such as, “Why is this place sacred?” or “Why is this liturgical act performed?”. The legend of Jacob’s dream established the sacred place called Bethel (the ‘House of God’) at the place formally known as Luz. There may once have been a ceremony there that involved the anointing of a stone with oil, just as Jacob does in the legend. The story thus could have provided an explanation for the ceremony and invested it with a meaning that was specific to the site. Gunkel, in his classic commentary on Genesis suggested that the Bethel stories illustrate the evolution of the theology. In primitive times, he argued, the deity was thought to be in the stone, and the pouring of oil was an offering. Later the deity was considered to be in heaven and to have many divine companions – a transition illustrated in the legend by the ladder connecting earth and heaven on which the angels of Elohim are ascending and descending. It is possible to pursue this further and note that if the two accounts of this event are separated, then the one attributable to J, possibly the least primitive, has no angels and no ladder, but simply Yahweh standing over Jacob.

Another Jacob story may preserve the founding legend for the shrine at Penuel in the form of Jacob’s struggle with a divine being. Here Gunkel suggested the local liturgy may once have involved a limping dance. However that may be, the stories adopt the classic etiological form - answering a good many questions in a few short verses. Why was the thigh bone never eaten? Because it was made sacred by this encounter. Why was Jacob also called Israel? Because he struggled (Hebrew root ‘srh’) with god (hebrew ‘el’). Why was the place called Penuel? Because Jacob saw god face to face (hebrew root ‘pny’).

Other shrines at Beersheba, Manahaim, Hebron, Gilgal, and elsewhere may have similarly preserved stories associated with their locations. The close connection between the legends and the shrines was emphasised by the unique names of the deity that link the legend with the location. Thus it was only at Beersheba, where he planted a sacred grove in Genesis 21, that Abram called upon the deity known as ‘El-Olam’ (‘Everlasting God’). It was only at Salem, in Abraham’s meeting with Mechizedek in Genesis 14, that reference was made to ‘El Elyon’ (‘God Most high’). It was only at Beer Lahai Roi, the well in the desert to which Hagar escaped when abused by Sarah, that reference is made to ‘El Lahai Roi’ (‘Living God who Sees’).

In contrast to these shrine names, ‘El Shaddai’ (for which there is a Hurrian but not a Hebrew etymology) was linked to the nomadic patriarchs and therefore not to a specific location. It did however bind together the patriarchal legends and confirm their origin in Hurrian Mesopotamia. The only other use of Shaddai in the Pentateuch occurs in the prophecies of Balaam – another non-Israelite source<sup>17</sup>.

It is possible that some of the early stories recount in legendary form the changing relationships between the tribes. Thus the story of Jacob stealing Esau’s blessing reflects a memory of a once secondary Israel (Jacob) coming to dominate a once strong Edom (Esau), and the story of the births of Moab and Benammi springing out of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters reflects something about the way that Moab and Ammon were once viewed by Israel. Perhaps the most interesting example is the way the stories of Laban and Jacob can be seen as a metaphor for the changing relationship between Damascus and Israel in the 9th century BCE. Thus it is possible that in the Patriarchal stories there are elements of Hurrian myths whose trace remains only in some of the names, overlaid by ancient social relationships no longer understood and thus imaginatively developed, overlaid again by a complex religious history of shrines and theological development and finally moulded into a metaphor for 9<sup>th</sup> century regional politics! The process of adaptation and adoption may be long and complex.

Stories may also develop around the physical phenomena that surrounded the early Israelites. For example, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah served to account for the appearance of the sulphurous volcanic region in the Southern end of the Dead Sea. That there was one habitable spot in this desert was explained by the legend of Zoar. Similarly, the ruined city of Jericho inspired the story of its ritual capture.

Myths and legends from foreign and Israelite sources, sometimes preserved by ancient shrines, others by tribal tradition, were adapted, adopted and woven together to form coherent accounts, each with

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<sup>17</sup> Outside the Pentateuch, Shaddai is used extensively in Job (31 instances), but otherwise just twice in Ruth and Ezekiel, once each in Joel and Isaiah and in psalms 68 and 91. The overwhelming use of Shaddai is thus associated with texts of foreign origin or texts making foreign references

its own perspective.

### The Integrity of the Sources

Somewhat remarkably, it appears that the four main sources have survived more or less intact. The redactors who combined the texts seems to have gone to a lot of trouble to retain all the significant material from each text. The result is that each source, when separated out, can be read as an almost continuous account. The J source has even been published as a separate text<sup>18</sup>.

It would, however, be surprising if the redactors who edited the sources retained every single word from all the texts, especially if two of the texts used virtually identical words – a not unlikely circumstance as they were sometimes telling the same story. Why put the same phrase in twice? It would surely satisfy the sensitivities of the advocates of both sources if each could read the phrase as their own. It is not as if the redactors needed to prepare a text in which every single word could be uniquely allocated to only one source in order to satisfy the biblical scholars of later millennia – and yet that is often what seems to be assumed in some scholarly analyses.

An example of a situation where a sentence from one text could supply the needs of another can be found in the accounts of Jacob's death. In the J source, immediately after Jacob's blessing, Joseph falls weeping on Jacob's face and commands that his father be embalmed. Of course, it is possible that J felt that implying Jacob's death through Joseph's reaction was dramatically satisfactory, and that there is no text missing. But it is perhaps more likely that some J text such as "and Jacob died" has been cut from the original J source because the adjacent material in the combined text made such a statement redundant. The text which has been inserted after J's report of Joseph's tears says that Jacob *'pulled up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people'* It is usually assumed that all these three indicators of death come from P<sup>19</sup>. What would the redactor have gained by including *'and Jacob died'*? Is not the sentence sufficient to cover whatever J might have written, as well as being part of the P account of the same event? Either way, there is no decisive evidence of significant missing text.

Perhaps more significant is J's lack of a full explanation of Joseph's rise to power. At one point Joseph is in prison, but has gained the trust of the warden so that he effectively came to be in charge because *'Yahweh was with him and, whatever he did, Yahweh made it prosper'*. But by the time we next hear of Joseph in J's vocabulary he has become *'the one who was in charge of the land – the one who sold grain to the people'*. How he came from being in charge of the prison to being in charge of grain sales appears to have been lost – or did the author simply want to surprise us with Yahweh's power having warned us that *'Whatever he did, Yahweh made it prosper.'*?

Another surprise is the complete absence of any plague stories in the J source. The crucial part of J's exodus story moves from Pharaoh's refusal to *'let the people go'* to their escape under Yahweh's protection. There appears to be no intervening events. J probably wrote: -

*Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said, "Yahweh, god of Israel, says, 'Let my people go so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.'" Pharaoh said, "Who is Yahweh that I should listen to him and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh. I will not let Israel go." But Yahweh went in front of them to show them the way - in a column of cloud by day and in a column of fire by night to give them light so that they could walk by day and night. The column of cloud by day and the column of fire by night never departed from in front of the people. And the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled.*<sup>20</sup>

Is this a continuous story or an indication of some missing text? Even if it jars with the more popular story, it reads with satisfactory, indeed dramatic, continuity. The sequence *'Let my people go', 'I will not let Israel go', 'they could walk by day and night' and 'was told the people had fled'* creates an artistically satisfying progression which is lost in today's bible by the lengthy accounts of the plague that

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<sup>18</sup> Friedman, R E (1998); *'The Hidden Book in the Bible'*

<sup>19</sup> *'Breathed his last' and 'gathered to his people'* are characteristic P phrases often linked together as they are here. But *'pulled up his feet into his bed'* although generally assigned with the rest of the verse to P, could conceivably be a J phrase. It seems to be have been used only on this occasion

<sup>20</sup> Exodus 5:1-2 & 13:21-22 & 14:5a.

have been inserted from other sources.

E appears to be a more episodic work than J. It is a collection of individual stories from the Northern tradition in the same genre of the many 'Tales from the Bible' that can be found in today's bookshops. E does not have a creation story, nor does this text link the individual patriarchal stories to each other in the way that J does. There is no reason to suppose that the E text once included a creation story that is now lost. Creation stories were not mandatory: the text of Deuteronomy, which relies to a degree on Northern tradition, has no creation story either. There is equally no reason to suppose that the individual E stories, continuous in themselves, were ever more than stand-alone stories. In E, all the stories about the patriarchs – Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Moses – are about what they did in their adult life; there are no accounts of their births. Some of the stories seem to start very abruptly as if some introductory phrase is missing. For example, the E account of Jacob's dream begins with something like "*He took one of the stones from that place and set it as his headrest*" What place? The answer is provided by the previous sentence, which could be J and which reads "*Jacob went from Beersheba towards Haran, and he came to a place where he stayed the night because the sun was setting.*" Duplicating that sentence, or something like it, when the texts were merged would have been absurd. A similar case occurs in the story of the births of the children of Jacob, the fathers of the tribes. The story begins with the words "*Rachael was jealous of her sister and said to Jacob, 'Give me children...*", but in E it has not even been mentioned that Leah and Rachel were married to Jacob, so it appears that there is a missing opening sentence such as "*Laban married his daughters Leah and Rachael to Jacob, but Rachel bore Jacob no children...*". In the merged text, such an opening, if it ever existed, is rendered redundant by J's lengthy description of Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel and has therefore been omitted by the redactor. It can also be surmised that at the time of writing, the audience for these stories would have understood the context; they would have known who Jacob, Rachel and Leah were. For them no introduction was needed. So perhaps the story really began, "*Rachel was jealous of her sister...*" All these texts emerged in an oral society. The main means of transmitting the stories was probably from grandparents and parents to children; such a means of transmission favours short self-contained stories built around familiar characters, events or places. The continuity of the modern novel is not to be expected. It is therefore the continuity of J that should surprise us – not the episodic nature of E.

P was more concerned with law than with narrative unless that narrative was key to P's special interests – sound theology and the supremacy of the Aaronite Priesthood. Therefore some of the stories that were told in full in J are only treated cursorily in P. This can give a sense of omission. For example, part of the P's version of the Abram cycle reads: -

*Abram was 75 years old when he left [Haran]. Abram took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot and all the possessions they had gathered and the persons they had acquired, and they set out for the land of Canaan. And they came to the land of Canaan. But the land could not support them both, because their possessions were so great that they could not live together. So they separated, each from his brother. Abram lived in the land of Canaan and Lot lived in the cities of the plain. After Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. Hagar gave birth of a son to Abram, and Abram called the son, whom Hagar had born, Ishmail.<sup>21</sup>*

That material, now found scattered between Genesis 12 and the end of Genesis 16, omits much of the story as told by J. In particular, it does not include an explanation as to why Sarai gave Hagar to Abram, although the reader could perhaps infer that Sarai could not have children herself.

The next chapter in today's Genesis contains an extended piece of P text about circumcision. Circumcision was to be the sign of the covenant between El Shaddai and Abraham, now renamed Abram. El Shaddai declared,

*"I'll Establish my covenant with Isaac whom Sarah will bear for you at the appointed time next year." And Elohim finished speaking with Abraham, and went up from him.*

Then the unbroken P text continued with a promise concerning Ishmail, concluding -

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<sup>21</sup> Genesis 12:5 & 13:6,11b,12a & 16:3,15

*That very day, Abraham and his son Ishmail were circumcised, as were all the males of his house – slaves born in the house and those bought with money from foreigners. And it was, when Elohim destroyed the cities of the plain, that Elohim remembered Abraham and, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot lived, he sent Lot out from their midst. And at the time of which Elohim had spoken, Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised Isaac his son at eight days old - as Elohim had commanded him.* <sup>22</sup>

Here the material was highly abbreviated with the destruction of Lot's city being mentioned without any explanation. Furthermore, the account of Isaac's birth, although anticipated earlier, is so abrupt that some scholars are inclined to allow the preceding text's "and Yahweh did to Sarah as he had promised" as P despite it using Yahweh as the divine name<sup>23</sup>. However, brief as this material is, it still reads intelligibly, introducing nothing essential for which the reader had not been prepared. For P, the significant fact about the destruction of Lot's cities was that Lot was rescued because Elohim remembered Abraham and his immediate obedience in the matter of circumcision. And the significant fact about Isaac's birth was that it occurred when Elohim said it would and that Abraham circumcised him at the time Elohim required.

So far the texts have been examined for potential discontinuities. In the instances studied it has been possible to argue that the missing text, if real, is insignificant or can be accounted for by the inclusion of similar uncontroversial material from another source together with a desire to avoid redundant repetition. But is it possible to show positively that an original continuity existed in texts that are now broken up? To do this, we would need to find a place where a later author refers to a passage which was for him continuous, but which, in our bible, has been fragmented. The numbers of references from one passage to another by a different author are not so many as to make any such find likely, but yet William Propp claims to have found an example<sup>24</sup>.

It is generally recognised that Ezekiel, a priest in exile, knew the Priestly source. Propp noted that Ezekiel 20 relates to Exodus 2: 23b - 25 and the following P text in Exodus 6:2 – even though, in our bible, a substantial amount of the material has been inserted between these two points. If these two P passages are brought together and the intervening material omitted the recovered text is revealed as the originally continuous P: -

*The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of their slavery their cry for help rose up to god. God heard their groaning, and god remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and made himself known to them. // God spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name 'Yahweh' I did not make myself known. Furthermore. I established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings and I have heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am Yahweh, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your god. You shall know that I am Yahweh your god, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you out into the land that I raised my hand to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am Yahweh.'*<sup>25</sup>

The P material is clearly distinct from other passages in the midst of which it lies in today's bible. Within the context of the Pentateuch as a whole, this was definitely not the first time that Yahweh had revealed his name to his people for Genesis 4:26 says that the name Yahweh was invoked on earth after the

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<sup>22</sup> Genesis 17:19-26,27 & 19:29 & 21:2b,3,4

<sup>23</sup> It is that the divine name could have been changed by scribal error in this isolated instance – a plausible hypothesis in view of the similarity between this verse and the previous J sentence.

<sup>24</sup> The Priestly source recovered intact? *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 46, Fasc. 4 (Oct., 1996), pp. 458-478

<sup>25</sup> Exodus 2:23b-25 & 6:2-9 (Septuagint version)

birth of Seth to Adam and Eve (J text). Could the P material originally have been two separate editorial comments on the adjacent material? If they were, then the words from Exodus 2 (the first part of the quotation above up to the // mark) would introduce the burning bush episode, which is the purpose these verses serve in the bible as we have it today. But if they were originally together (as in the whole passage quoted above) then the Exodus 2 passage serves as part of the Priestly account of the revelation of the divine name and the promise to rescue the people from slavery. This is where Ezekiel 20:5-6a clarifies matters. There the author of Ezekiel wrote: -

*Thus says Yahweh God: On the day when I chose Israel, I raised my hand to the offspring of the house of Jacob—making myself known to them in the land of Egypt—I raised my hand to them, saying, I am Yahweh your god. On that day, I raised my hand to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt.*

Ezekiel indicates that his understanding was based on an account in which the Exodus 6 passage was a continuation of Exodus 2:25. For him, Yahweh revealed the divine name, making himself known to Israel whilst the Israelites were in Egypt and on the same day promised to take them out of Egypt. The Exodus 2 passage declares the divine intention to ‘*make himself known*’ to his people and the Exodus 6 passage follows immediately with the execution of that intention.

The phrase ‘*making myself known to them*’ in Ezekiel 20 is virtually a quotation from the integrated Exodus passage. Another clear connection is the phrase “*I will bring you out to the land that I raised my hand to give*”. There are other connections detailed in the footnote<sup>26</sup>. Thus, at least in this instance, it is possible to confirm the documentary hypothesis.

From the combination of all the evidence – of language, style, content, consistency and continuity – it appears that the books of the Pentateuch were put together from major primary sources which were distinct, self sufficient and internally consistent texts. Furthermore, it seems that the redactor went to considerable lengths to include almost all the material from each source. This suggests that, by the time the redactor came to edit and merge the sources together, they had already acquired something of the unalterable status of scripture.

#### The sequence of the texts

The dates of each text, their dependence on other texts and the evidence that supports these hypotheses will be discussed in the chapters dealing with the texts themselves, but it is appropriate in this introduction to review the overall sequence of the texts that this evidence supports.

P used J, correcting it where necessary. P followed J’s order in arranging the stories that they share – significantly shortening them in the process. A good example of his use and correction of a J text occurs in the opening verse of Genesis. P follows the form and structure of the beginning of J’s creation story. But whereas J wrote “*In the day of Yahweh’s making of earth and heavens*” (Genesis 2:4), P reversed the priorities declaring instead ‘*In the beginning of Elohim’s creation of the heavens and the earth*’ (Genesis 1:1). Not only does P change the divine name to Elohim<sup>27</sup>, but he also reversed ‘earth and heaven’ to

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<sup>26</sup> The phrase ‘made himself known’ comes from the Septuagint and matches exactly the phrase used in Ezekiel. Translations based on the MT have to confront the problem that the last words of verse 25 in that version are ‘and Elohim knew.’ Knew what? Translators often feel the need to add a word or change the verb – or both; thus the NSRV has ‘and God took notice of them’ and the NIV has ‘and (God) was concerned about them.’ The phrase ‘make myself known’ is picked up in Exodus 6:3 (even in the MT) so that it looks as if the MT version of Exodus 2:25 contains a scribal error that possibly arose after the Priestly text was broken up. There are strong connections between the language of Ezekiel 20 and the Exodus passages which suggest Ezekiel’s awareness of them. The Exodus phrase, “I shall bring you out to the land that I raised my hand (that is ‘swore’) to give to Abraham” connects with much in the Ezekiel passage quoted and also with Ezekiel 20:28a “When I brought them to the land that I raised my arm to give to them.” and phrases from Ezekiel 20:33-35 (“...with a strong hand and an extended arm...I shall take you out...I shall judge.”) recall Exodus 6:6. And Ezekiel 20:38 refers to the ‘land of sojournings’, the same as the phrase used in Exodus 6:4.

<sup>27</sup> It is probable that an editor added ‘Elohim’ to the ‘Yahweh’ of the Genesis 2 account in order to achieve

establish the precedence of heaven. Some of J's stories are dealt with so briefly in P that some scholars believe that the P of Genesis and Exodus should be understood as a commentary on J and not as a wholly independent original text. Whether this is so or not, P certainly expected his readers to be familiar with the J stories.

Within the Priestly texts, it is apparent that H followed P, for there are H comments on P passages. For example, after P has described the making of the tabernacle, there is a recapitulation in H language of the law of the Sabbath – a reminder that even this great holy work did not justify the breaking of the Sabbath<sup>28</sup>.

D copied and sometimes updated laws that found an earlier expression in P and H. In one instance D needed to explain a term, *sha'atnez* (meaning linen and wool mixed together)<sup>29</sup> because the term had fallen out of use by the time the Deuteronomist was writing. The text of D, or at least some of it, was therefore written after P and H. Jeremiah was inspired by the book that was discovered in King Josiah's time, which is widely believed to be core Deuteronomy. In places, he criticised the theology of both J and P, so that his work, which can be clearly dated, provides an end-date which all the works of J, P, H and core Deuteronomy must precede.

But what of E? There are no really clear-cut references to E by the other major sources, although parts of Deuteronomy may have followed E's account. The archaeological evidence points to the northern kingdom having the wealth, capability and need to employ scribes a century or so before Judah had that capability. But did it do so? The E text contained material that attacked the shrines at Dan and Bethel where the Israelite kings maintained 'golden calves' for their people to worship. The polemic against these shrines also contained an attack on the Aaronite Jerusalem priests whose ancestor, the northern E alleged, was the first to make a golden calf. P, on the other hand, has a story, unique to his text, about the northern Korah family, showing that they were an unsuitable family to work as priests before the altar in Jerusalem. Was this written in response to the E story about Aaron, or was it written at the time that the Korah family were Northern refugees seeking to join their fellow Levites in serving before Yahweh's altar – a privilege that the Aaronite family did not want to share? It is certainly possible that E preceded P, and maybe even J. It can be noted that some E stories - such as the binding of Isaac and Moses' redemption by the blood of his son - appear to retain images from a more ancient religion than the comparable legends from J. Whilst it is possible to tentatively posit a sequence that runs E-J-P-H-D, the evidence for the priority of E so far adduced is somewhat slight.

#### The evidence of the Festivals

The evidence for the priority of E can however be strengthened by an examination of the way the festivals were described in each of the texts. Each of these texts contained their own description of the festivals and each is different. If a logical evolutionary path for the development of the festivals can be established, then that path may also point to the sequence in which the texts were composed.

In E, the description of the festivals<sup>30</sup> occurs within the Covenant Code which may once have been an independent text that was later incorporated. It described three festivals – of Unleaven Bread; of the Harvest of the first fruits; and of the final Ingathering at the turning of the agricultural year. Only the first of these feasts had a defined date ('*at the appropriate time in the month of Aviv*') and even that was somewhat vague and may even be a parenthetic editorial insert. 'Aviv' is held by some scholars to be a Canaanite name for the first month of the year<sup>31</sup>. The timing of the other two feasts were determined entirely by agricultural events. This was a schedule for a settled agricultural state largely concerned with sowing and harvesting, rather than managing herds and flocks. There was no requirement for animal

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some continuity in the combined text when he added the priestly account of creation in Genesis 1. The double name 'Yahweh Elohim' is rare in the bible although standard in Genesis 2 and 3. Having familiarised his readers with the idea, he dropped the practice from chapter 4 onwards.

<sup>28</sup> Exodus 31:13-17

<sup>29</sup> Deuteronomy 22:11 – although some translations disguise the fact that this is an explanation, by inserting words that make '*linen and wool*' appear as an example of *sha'atnez*.

<sup>30</sup> Exodus 23:14-19

<sup>31</sup> See the article on the Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish and Hebrew Calendars by James C Vabderkam in ABD

sacrifices. There was no mention of a Passover festival. The only reference to a historical event was the one included in the parenthetic comment about Aviv (*for in that month you came out of Egypt*). All this fits with northern, Canaanite, tradition and culture, for that country was primarily agricultural, as opposed to the nomadic south, and its recollection of an association with Egypt was not necessarily related to being slaves there.

The J description<sup>32</sup> followed the E text verbatim but added extra material of its own. It deleted nothing from the E text. The first addition was the instruction to include animal sacrifice (*the first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock*) – an entirely appropriate addition for a nomadic society of herdsmen and shepherds. Another important addition is a casual reference to Passover *and do not let anything from the festival of Passover remain until morning* tacked on to the end of an admonition not to offer blood along with anything containing yeast. There is also an insertion about not working on the Sabbath even during the ploughing and harvest seasons – a prohibition that would have been less problematic in nomadic Judah than in agricultural Israel. In both E and J, the people are instructed to attend the three festivals, but in J there is the additional assurance that *no-one will covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before Yahweh your god*. Nomads are less attached to a particular piece of land than agriculturalists.

It is more plausible to believe that these J additions were added to the E original, than that a J original was cut down to provide the E text. Why would anyone remove the final assurance? Of course, they could both have used a common independent text, with E using it unmodified and J tacking on the additions, but the exact duplication of E in J taken together with the huge differences between both and the Priestly texts – the most likely source for a common independent text – makes the independent lost text hypothesis less likely than the simple solution that J used E.

The Book of Numbers contains an extended Priestly description of the sacrifices that were to be made each day, each Sabbath, each month and at each festival.<sup>33</sup> It is completely independent of the E or J festival texts. The massive scale of the sacrifices, with whole herds of bulls, lambs and goats offered at each of the festivals, indicates that this is a temple document; and from a wealthy time. Although clearly originating from the temple, it may not have been an original P document, although it may have been an elaboration of one. All the festivals except that of the first fruits were given precise dates, but ‘Canaanite’ month names were replaced by month numbers. It included a passing reference to Passover, but only to give it a date; there was no description of the festival itself. It was to be immediately followed by a week-long unnamed festival with substantial temple sacrifices. The temple days of Trumpets and Atonement have been included, but as these were not pilgrimage festivals, it is understandable that they were mentioned only in the Priestly texts but not in E or J. The last festival, also not named in the text, involved the most extensive sacrifices.

H is also believed to have been a temple priest. It is consistent with that belief that his account<sup>34</sup> also included details of the temple days of Trumpets and Atonement. Like P, all festivals except that of the first fruits of the harvest festival were given dates using numbered months, but there was still no information about the Passover sacrifice and meal. H described a more developed ritual than P. At the festival of the first fruits, for example, H required that a sheaf of the first grain should be waved before Yahweh and followed by the sacrifice of a year-old lamb with flour, oil and wine. Only in H are precise instructions given as to how the date of the festival was to be determined – it was seven full weeks from the day when the sheaf was waved, which was restricted to being one day after a Sabbath. H concentrates on what individual pilgrim groups were expected to bring to the festivals, and not the total numbers of animals to be sacrificed in the temple during the festival. At the middle festival, H instructed that two loaves be brought and offered together with seven lambs, a male calf<sup>35</sup> and two rams. For the last festival, H mentioned that daily sacrifice was required but did not specify what was expected in detail. The original H text concluded with the words *“These are Yahweh’s appointed festivals...Theses offerings are in addition to Yahweh’s Sabbaths ...and to your freewill offerings”*.<sup>36</sup> In today’s bible this is followed by a later

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<sup>32</sup> Exodus 34:18-23

<sup>33</sup> Numbers 28 & 29

<sup>34</sup> Leviticus 23:1-36

<sup>35</sup> Literally, ‘a young bullock, a son of the herd’; not a full-grown bull, as many translations seem to suggest.

<sup>36</sup> Leviticus 23:37-38

editorial addition stemming from exilic times when this festival was developed to become the festival of booths (Tabernacles).<sup>37</sup>

Although neither P's account nor that of H depend on E or J in any way, the use of Israelite month designations in place of the more primitive Canaanite names is a slight indication that they may have followed both the other two. The more formal rigid structure of the festivals and the development of spectacular sacrifices may be a reflection that by the time this text was written, the temple priesthood had increased in power and influence, something that happened during the reign of Hezekiah.

It was in the D text<sup>38</sup> that for the first time there was an extended description of the Passover festival. A lamb was to be sacrificed and eaten at the place that '*Yahweh will choose as a dwelling for his name*'; nothing was to be left over till morning when the pilgrims were to return to their tents and eat unleaven bread for the next six days. Whereas up to this point, Passover had been treated as a domestic celebration with the Feast of Unleaven Bread being the main seven-day pilgrimage festival, now Passover had become the pilgrimage festival and the week of unleavened bread was to be passed at home. D dropped all mention of a festival of the first fruits of the harvest, but the time at which '*you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain*' was to be used as the basis for determining the date of the middle festival. The latter was to be celebrated with sons, daughters, slaves, Levites, foreigners, orphans and widows. The people were admonished to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt and to bring a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings they had themselves received. Likewise, the last harvest festival was to be celebrated as a community event involving every one.

Through these five descriptions it is possible to trace the progressive lessening of the importance of the festival of first fruits and the increase in the importance attached to Passover. We may note that Kings and Chronicles affirm that Passover was not celebrated as a national holiday until the days of King Josiah. Although it is possible that Hezekiah held a once-off celebration during his reign, this seems to have been largely forgotten by the time Deuteronomy came to be written<sup>39</sup>. Thus it is likely that the description in Deuteronomy, which is the only one to give Passover national significance, postdates all the others.

Overall the evidence of the festivals is consistent with an E-J-P-H-D sequence. In particular, it lends weight to the hypothesis that E, or at least the Covenant Code within it, was earlier than J. Since it is also clear that Israel had the capability to create a written epic before Judah, it seems sensible to start an examination of the Epics in their context by looking at the history of the northern kingdom, which must have provided background for the writing of the Elohist Epic.

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<sup>37</sup> Leviticus 23:39-43 This additional material described the building of booths for the festival of tabernacles can be shown to be an exilic insertion, since when Ezra read out the instructions for building the booths, it was a complete surprise to the people (Nehemiah 8:16). It follows that the naming of last festival as 'Tabernacles' in verse 34 would have been a harmonising adjustment introduced by an editor.

<sup>38</sup> Deuteronomy 16:1-17

<sup>39</sup> The author of Kings says that no national Passover celebration took place between the time of the Judges and that of Hezekiah. The Chronicler however recounts an occasion in which Hezekiah sent out invitations to the surrounding peoples to come to Jerusalem for a Passover – albeit on the wrong date because the priests could not be consecrated in time for the correct date. (2 Chronicles 30)