As I promised last time, before leaving the Deuteronomistic History I want to
diagram for you what I consider a likely (if sketchy) approximation of how this
work came to be written. We’ll start with the core of the book of Deuteronomy, to
be located in the legal code of chapters 12-26, itself a reworking of the “Book of
the Covenant” found in Exodus 20-23. Roughly speaking, this legal code was
produced during the early years of the monarchy, although we’re likely talking
about a process rather than an event that occurred at a single time.

Indeed, following King Hezekiah’s innovations at the end of the 8th century
B.C.E., language requiring sacrificial worship in the one place the LORD would
cause his name to dwell was integrated into the code.

To this code was prefixed an introduction, reviewing the people’s journeys in
the wilderness, with special attention to the sojourn at Horeb (= Sinai), where
Moses received the Decalogue, plus the law code he is about to present, directing
how they are to live in their land. Moses exhorts the people to commit themselves
to loyalty to the LORD, in words patterned after the oaths of allegiance Assyrian
kings posed on their vassals. That similarity, alone, places the composition of this
introduction within the same era as Hezekiah, since Assyrian influence began to be
felt in the coastlands of the Mediterranean only in the early 8th century B.C.E.

Subjoined to the law code was a set of blessings and curses, again in keeping
with patterns found throughout the ANE for relationships between overlords and
their subjects and in accord, more specifically, with the kinds of promises of
beneficence and threats of punishments that accompanied the loyalty oaths
imposed by Assyrian rulers. If the people adhered to the requirements of the legal
code, they would find prosperity in the land; if not, they would find life miserable.

But to this composition were added a second introduction and conclusion, which
elevated the law code to the status of an inviolable set of commandments
constituting a book to be read (aloud), studied and obeyed. Most likely this was an
aftershock of the post-Hezekiah era, when his son, Manasseh, was on the throne.
Clearly the demands for adherence to this code as a book were in place when it
was discovered in the temple during Josiah's reign in the last quarter of the 7th
century.

In the same era, a “first edition” (so to speak) of a history of Israel’s life was
fashioned out of records and folklore. Of course, for the book of Joshua this has to
do just with the story of conquest in chapters 1-11 and Joshua’s farewell speech in
chapter 23. In Judges, this edition encompassed 2:6-16.31, with its cycle of
apostasy, oppression, the people crying out, the L ORD sending a “Judge” to deliver
them from their oppressors, followed by a period of peace, with renewed apostasy
resuming the cycle. Then the author shifts the focus to exemplars of the societal discord implied in those stories, but with the aim of showing the ill-affects on society of not having a king, thus paving the way to the story of the rise of the monarchy via the hand of Samuel in the early chapters of 1 Samuel, following a set of stories of Samuel's birth and youth. Incidentally, those initial stories find parallels in the stories of some of the Judges, especially Samson, the circumstances of whose birth is narrated before the stories of his deeds.

The narrative of the rise of the monarchy (1 Sam 8-12) appears to have originally concerned the demand for a king to execute justice, given the failure of Samuel's sons to prove themselves reliable judges. Similarly, the story of Saul's reign contains vestiges of an earlier narrative much more positive in its evaluation of the first king, including ways he complied with Deuteronomy's requirements.

The remainder of 1 Samuel details the rise of David and the growing paranoia of Saul about David's intentions, with the outcome being the death of Saul and his son, Jonathan, in the final chapter of the book. The prolonged intrigue involving David and Saul undoubtedly go back to the sources the Deuteronomist inherited, although occasional scenes show evidence of the same writer who reworked earlier narratives to infuse them with the theme of the prophets' domination of kings.

Prophets play a prominent role in the story of David's reign in 2 Samuel. Indeed, in 2 Samuel 7 the Deuteronomist (undoubtedly of the first edition) refashions a story about David's proposal to build a temple, its rejection by the LORD (who refuses to allow anyone to be his patron), and the LORD's substitute promise to build David a house, expanding it into a promise of an eternal dynasty for David, together with the assertion that David's son would build the temple.

In the books of 1 & 2 Kings, we can think of everything through 2 Kings 20, where the report of Hezekiah's reign ends, as constituting part of this so-called “first edition” of the Deuteronomistic History. The commendation of Hezekiah, standing at the beginning of the report of his reign in chapter 18, says, “He trusted in the LORD the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him.”

By the way, that last phrase, “or among those who were before him,” is quite awkward syntactically, and likely was added by a scribe later. The report that no succeeding king measured up to Hezekiah implies, of course, that the author wrote at least within the reign of Manasseh, although it is uncertain if the report of Manasseh’s reign was included in this “first edition.” So the first edition of the DH likely concluded with the end of what we know as the end of 2 Kings 20.

The second edition of this work was produced during the time of Josiah, and extends through the majority of chapter 23. But how far? Where does it conclude?

One of the differences to be noted between the edition produced after Hezekiah is that whereas that edition places the commendation of Hezekiah as the “best king
ever” together with the initial report of his reign, the Josianic edition separates the two. Here is the summary of Josiah’s reign at the beginning of the report: “Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.”

Only at the end of his story do we find a comparison to other kings: “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.” Similar to the phrase “or among those who were before him” in chapter 18, the final phrase, “nor did any like him arise after him,” speaks from the time following Josiah's death and thus was not part of the work constructed to endorse his reforms, making it likely something appended by the author of the third edition. While a definitive conclusion on this matter is not possible, the second edition might well have ended just before that phrase in 23:25.

In any case, it's clear that the Josianic author made some insertions into earlier material to integrate his hero’s into the pre-existing storyline. In particular, as we have seen, he supplied a prophecy of Josiah’s demolition of King Jeroboam’s altar at Bethel, even identifying Josiah by name.

The final edition of the Deuteronomistic History is from an exilic editor/author, who added the final chapters to the book. But, of course, that’s not all he added. As you’ll recall, he also inserted material into earlier passages, as in 1 Kings 9, where he subjoined to the divine promise to Solomon of his offspring sitting on the throne of Israel if he kept the LORD’s commands a warning addressed to a group about the threat of exile and the destruction of the LORD’s house if they wandered from what the LORD required of them and worshipped other gods.

The other example we noted was in 2 Kings 21, where, in a list of Manasseh’s crimes, the author attached to a quotation of the LORD's words regarding the temple a report that the people had refused to listen to the LORD’s warnings through his prophets, and so the LORD decided to destroy Jerusalem.

It is quite likely at this stage, also, that the story of the rise of the monarchy was transformed from an account of the monarchy's introduction to promote justice into a negation of the value of kings, together with setting up the harsh relationship between kings and prophets that we find evidenced in passages like the one we just saw integrated into the report of Manasseh's reign.

Similarly, it is at this same level of redaction/editing that the account of Saul's reign was altered from a story of a successful king who implemented elements of Deuteronomy's demands into one of a king gone wrong by rejecting the word of the LORD through a prophet.

These are certainly not the only examples of the ways the second and third
editions tied their work into earlier phases of the narrative, but they do give you the idea of how this work was reshaped by multiple authors. QUESTIONS ON DH?

Ironically, as this work was taking shape, so was another, whose central concern was, as we shall see, similar to that of the Deuteronomistic History, even though its storyline precedes that of Israel’s life in the land.

The books of Genesis through Numbers, within in the Torah – which became a Pentateuch with the inclusion of Deuteronomy – offers a history-like narrative that begins with the creation of the world and ends with the people of Israel ready to take their land. It is this massive work we'll turn our attention to for the latter half of this course.

The Hebrew word “Torah” means “instruction.” Even though later Jewish sources use a Greek word meaning “law” to translate this word, "law" conveys somewhat of a mistaken idea of the Torah is if it leads us to think of a legal code. While the Torah contains legal codes, those codes are not the heart of the Torah. In the words of the late scholar Peter Craigie, the Torah is, above all, “a carefully arranged narrative.” – The codes for how Israel is to conduct itself and its worship appear in the context of the story of Abraham and his descendents, so that they become the instruction of Israel’s God for the nation he has created. The narrative of the Torah is, in fact, its indispensable core, defining who Israel is in terms of the LORD’s care for them and his instruction of them.

This body of literature is daunting. Not only does it offer an account of a broad expanse of time – from the creation of the world to the arrival of Abraham’s descendents on the threshold of the land promised them – but it also comprises a variety of stories, genealogies, peculiar events, and an anthology of regulations for life and worship. So the question is, who composed the Torah?

Within both Judaism and Christianity the tradition is strong that Moses was its author. And that is encouraged by several references to Moses writing down certain laws, as in the following verses: Exodus 24.4: And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain… Numbers 33:2: Moses wrote down their starting points, stage by stage, by command of the LORD. Deuteronomy 31.9: Then 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."

Moreover, throughout the Bible there are references to “the book of the Law of Moses,” as in 2 Kings 14.6: But [Joash] did not put to death the children of the murderers; according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses….

As iron-clad as this evidence might appear, there are, nevertheless, some problems with this supposition arise already with several of these allusions to Moses as an author. Most strikingly, each of the first three verses above speaks about Moses writing, making it unlikely that they were written by Moses. The
very fact that these verses describe Moses as an author of a particular law or set of laws points to someone else as their author.

Moreover, as you already know, the references to “the book of the law of Moses” in passages like Joshua 8.30-31, whose command to build “an altar of unhewn stones, on which no iron tool has been used,” can be traced back to one book of the Torah: Deuteronomy.

Indeed, as you are also now aware, references to "the book of the law of Moses" throughout the Deuteronomistic History consistently refer to the book of Deuteronomy and align with its penchant for speaking of itself as a book of the law that Moses wrote down.

Thus, when we come across language about “the book of the Law of Moses” or about Moses having written “this law,” it applies to Deuteronomy alone.

In fact, even though passages may speak of Moses writing down this or that report, the Torah, as a whole, is an anonymous work. Nowhere does it claim that Moses wrote every word.

Moreover, there are hints scattered throughout the Torah that pieces of it were written long after the time of Moses. E.g. Genesis 12.6, early in the story of Abraham, reports that Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh.” And then the narrator says in an aside, “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.” That sort of comment can be penned only when the Canaanites have been effectively driven from the land, something that didn’t happen until the time of the monarchy, the establishment of kingship in Israel.

Even more striking, in that light, is this note from Genesis 36.31: These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites.” This, too, is a retrospective statement, penned by someone long after Moses’ day. You can speak of kings reigning over the Israelites only after they have done so, even as someone who writes, “these are the kings that ruled over England before any President was elected in the United States” must have known of such elected Presidents.

Also telling are the words that open the book of Deuteronomy: “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan—in the wilderness, on the plain opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab.”

Once again here we have a narrator describing Moses. But even more significant is the statement of where Moses spoke to all Israel: beyond the Jordan. As Deuteronomy relates it, Moses dies before the people pass over the Jordan from its east bank. Here is the Jordan, and here is where Moses delivered his final oration and shortly after ascended a mountain and died. Accordingly, when the narrator places Moses speaking the words of the book “beyond () the Jordan,” the narrator has to be writing his story from the west side of the Jordan, i.e. within the land of Israel. Because Moses never sets foot there, these words had to have been
penned by someone other than Moses.

One final text, this one from Deuteronomy 34, which follows Moses’ death: “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.” That initial phrase, “Never since,” once again reflects historical distance from Moses. The author has seen a good many prophets, none of whom can measure up to Moses.

So the Torah itself contains indications that Moses was not the author of the whole, even if parts are attributed to him. But that observation again raises the question “who wrote the Torah? If not Moses, who?”

Students of the Bible had long noted the number of similar stories in the Torah. E.g. there are no less than three stories of a patriarch attempting to pass his wife off as his sister. Here is the first of those, from Genesis 12: “11 When [Abram] was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.” 14 When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. 16 And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels. 17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. 18 So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone.” 19 And Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had.”

Now let’s notice another incident involving Abraham in the same sort of scheme in chapter 20.1-15, which I’ll present in abbreviated form: “1While residing in Gerar as an alien, 2Abra-ham said of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” And King Abimelech of Gerar sent and took Sarah. 3But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “You are about to die because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a married woman…. 4Now then, return the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all that are yours.” 5So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid. 6Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I sinned against you, that you have brought such great guilt on me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that ought not to be done.”… 14Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and
female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him.

Abimelech said, “My land is before you; settle where it pleases you.”

We find Abraham in a different region than in the previous story – he is now in Gerar, a settlement south and west of Jerusalem. But the story line is the same: the Patriarch, out of fear for his life because of the beauty of his wife, passes Sara off as his sister, resulting in a threat to the natives. And again he is caught.

A third story with the same plot appears a little later, this time starring Abraham’s son, Isaac, in Genesis 26.6-11: 6 So Isaac settled in Gerar. 7 When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister”; for he was afraid to say, “My wife,” thinking, “or else the men of the place might kill me for the sake of Rebekah, because she is attractive in appearance.” 8 When Isaac had been there a long time, King Abimelech of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw him fondling his wife Rebekah. 9 So Abimelech called for Isaac, and said, “So she is your wife! Why then did you say, ‘She is my sister’?” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought I might die because of her.” 10 Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” 11 So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death.”

This story has similarities to the preceding story about Abraham. No doubt you noticed they are set in the same location: both Abraham and Isaac lived in Gerar. Not only that, but each incident occurs under the rule of a king named Abimelech. Moreover, Abimelech upbraids each patriarch in essentially the same words: “What have you done to us?” and “What is this you have done to us?”

While it is possible that both Abraham and Isaac fell prey to the same fear regarding their wives, and one might even argue that it’s possible it happened to them in the same place, the number of parallel features in these stories mount up to such a degree as to strain credibility, raising the question of whether these might be variations of a story. And when you recall that already in chapter 12 Abraham fell prey to the same fear and experienced a similar outcome, the evidence starts to become weighty that we’re dealing with multiple versions of a story.

These cases and others like them suggested to scholars the possibility that the Torah was assembled from variant versions of stories about Israel’s origins that were circulating among the people.

At the same time, especially beginning in the 18th century, scholars began observing that there were certain clusters of terms and ideas that congregated in meaningful ways within blocks of stories. E.g. some stories referred to the deity using the generic name for God, Elohim, while others used the Tetragrammaton, “the LORD.”

Similarly, certain stories focused on particular themes, such as circumcision or the Sabbath. And then there were differing characterizations of Israel’s god among
the stories, some of which portrayed him in strongly human terms, such as Genesis 2, which describes the LORD’s creation of the man as follows: “Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” – You can almost envision a human form scooping up soil, fashioning a body with his hands and then performing something like artificial resuscitation to infuse the man with life. The technical description of this is anthropomorphism; that is, the LORD’s actions are described as though he had human form. And that anthropomorphic characterization continues throughout not only Genesis 2, but also chapter 3.

By contrast, let’s consider how the creation of humans is described in chapter 1: “Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness… So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” – As in the rest of the chapter, creation takes place without God’s tangible involvement. In fact, most of the time creation occurs by God commanding features into existence. E.g., just a few verses prior to this, the creation of the birds and water fowl is narrated this way: “And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind.” – Throughout chapter 1 creation involves minimal exertion on God’s part, with no hint of anthropomorphic description. Such distinct representations of God are another feature commonly differentiating stories from one another.

The important point is that sets of such differences cluster in meaningful patterns. E.g., it’s not just the use of one name for God that unites several stories, but a number of such distinguishing features, so that (e.g.) you might find the same divine name used, along with a portrayal of God as aloof, and an interest in the Sabbath, distinguishing the set of stories carrying those features from another set of stories that use a different divine name and describe God anthropomorphically.

To diagram this algebraically, you might have two sets of stories, one of which shares features a-f and the other sharing features t-z. These kinds of distinctive commonalities and differences between groups of stories suggested that stories told from distinct perspectives became intertwined after they had already achieved their distinctive shapes by how they were told within a particular “school” of thought.

These sorts of observations evolved into a hypothesis, called the documentary hypothesis, which asserts that the Torah had been composed from four different documents, whose stories had been interwoven. The essential claim of this hypothesis is this: “The Torah was woven from four distinct, complete and coherent literary documents.”

That is to say, this hypothesis asserts that the similarities and differences
between groups of stories is to be explained by positing four, originally distinct narratives, thus accounting for the features shared by groups of stories as well as for the origins of multiple versions of stories. Moreover these were four complete and internally coherent narratives in written form, which were then sliced apart and recombined to form the Torah, in something of a scissors-and-paste approach.

In essence, the documentary hypothesis seeks to answer the question: What best accounts for the meaningful clusters of themes and multiple stories that are found in the Torah?

Let’s survey each of the documents posited by this hypothesis, beginning with the “J” source. It gains its siglum “J” because from the appearance of its first story, in Genesis 2, it uses for the deity the proper name YHWH, which in German is spelled JHWH, and thus the siglum J. This, of course, is common referred to as the Tetragrammaton, a Latin compound meaning “four letters.”

One of the distinctive features of stories from the J source is that from the very beginning they designate Israel’s God using the Tetragrammaton. In fact, the J source asserts that soon after creation, humans began invoking the name of the LORD.” The early use of the Tetragrammaton distinguishes this source from a couple of others we’ll look at in a moment.

Another of J’s distinguishing features is that it describes God in anthropomorphic terms, as we noted in the description of God forming the man from the dust of the ground. Note the similar anthropomorphic description of God in this verse from chapter 3, after Adam and Eve have eaten some of the forbidden fruit: “They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves....” Here God is depicted as if out for an evening’s stroll; the man and his wife can, in fact, hear him strolling through the garden. This kind of anthropomorphic description of God is characteristic of stories from the J source.

Because the stories in J frequently emphasize the themes of the gift of the land to Israel and the prolific growth of its people, it was posited that J was written during the reign of Solomon in the middle of the 10th century, and most likely in his royal court in Jerusalem. J was literature fit for a kingdom in full flower whose future appeared bright. It was written to explain this state of affairs as the fulfillment of God’s promises to the patriarchs of numerous offspring that would possess its own land and be a blessing to the nations.

Like the J source, the E source gains its siglum from a divine name. In this case, it is the generic Hebrew name for God, Elohim, that it uses without fail from the beginning of its story until Exodus 3, where Moses raises the following question as God cajoles him to go lead the people out of Egypt: “But 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
said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the
Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” The word translated “I am” derives from
the same root as the Tetragrammaton and is a play on it, suggesting that here the
divine personal name is being revealed to Moses to relay to the people. I.e. in
contrast to J, where everyone knows the Tetragrammaton from early on, in E it is
known first only with the arrival of Moses.

E shares many themes of J (such as the promises of land by a large nation) and
thus (according to the Documentary Hypothesis) was also written during the
monarchy’s early years (ca. 850), but in the north. That is deduced, in part, by the
fact that its stories tend to be told about sites in the north, over against J, that
focuses on events in the southern part of Israel.

Many of E’s stories are simply duplicate versions of stories in J (such as two of
the stories of Abraham passing Sarah off as his sister). Indeed, E is scantly repre-
sented and, the hypothesis asserts, likely was lost because the Torah’s editor opted
for the J version of many stories, thus frequently setting aside the E version.
What’s more, once E begins using the Tetragrammaton with Moses, its material
becomes difficult to distinguish from J.

The document labeled “P” gains its name from its absorption with the concerns
of the Priests, featuring topics such as sacrifice, circumcision, making certain one
is ritually pure when appearing before God, etc. It is “P,” for example that tells the
story of creation in Genesis 1, structured as a 7 day period, with the 7th day devoted
to divine rest, thus setting the pattern for Shabbat/the Sabbath.

Like E, it uses only “Elohim” until God reveals his name to Moses. In looking
at E we noted its version of that revelation to Moses. Here is P’s version, from
Exodus 6:2-3: God also spoke to Moses and said to him: “I am the LORD. I
appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name ‘The
LORD’ I did not make myself known to them.” So both E and P are adamant that
the divine name was not known before the Exodus.

Early proponents of the documentary hypothesis, as well as many who hold to it
today, date P to the late 6th/early 5th century B.C.E., the latest of the four
documents.

That leaves D, which is equivalent to Deuteronomy, or at least its fundamental
building blocks. The hypothesis posited that those basic building blocks, which
focus on northern locals, were likely brought to the south with the fall of the
northern kingdom and then were subsequently expanded to incorporate the kinds of
distinctive themes we've seen are characteristic of the book. An important point to
highlight from our earlier study of D is its distinctiveness from the tetrateueuch and
the three sources that compose them (J, E and P). D doesn’t play a role in the
intertwining of narratives that compose the books of Genesis through Numbers, so
we can more-or-less set it aside in considering the Tetrateuech.
The documentary hypothesis detected two ways the stories from these sources were intertwined in Genesis through Numbers. Their contents were sometimes created from the interweaving of J, E and P as individual narratives set side-by-side, as in this hypothetical representation of Genesis. In a few instances, however, the narratives themselves are composite, formed from pieces of the same story taken from more than one source and spliced together to form a single story.

To deal with this intertwining in concrete form, let’s tackle the story of the flood that I asked you to read over for today, divided into its two components sources of J and P. As I warned you on the download, you won’t find this sort of separation of stories in a normal Bible. I gave you the two versions of this story as distinguished by scholars and asked you to consider a few questions on that basis.

First, how do the names for God differ in the two stories? (J uses “the LORD” i.e. YHWH), while P uses “God” (Elohim))

Second, how does the portrayal of God differ in the two stories? (Both describe God as seeing what’s happening, destroying people, and issuing commands. However, J speaks of God’s emotions (anthropopathisms), as in vv. 6 & 7 which speak of God’s sorrow and grief at having created humans.)

P, by contrast, lacks any such anthropopathisms, which is typical of this source. P depicts God as far more aloof than J. Once again, it is J that speaks of God forming man from the dust of the ground etc., while P’s account of creation, in chapter 1, has God simply speaking things into existence with apparent ease and without direct contact. The same tendencies are noticeable here in the flood story.

Third, what differences do the stories show in the number of animals that accompany Noah in the ark? P speaks of one pair of every kind of animal, whether clean or unclean (6:19-20). J has seven pairs of clean animals, but only one pair of each unclean animal (7:2). What accounts for this difference? (Let’s look at what Noah does at the end of the flood, according to 8:20: “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” For J’s version, Noah needs the extra clean animals to offer on the altar following the flood. P’s narrative lacks that detail, likely because for it offerings to the LORD were impossible at this point, since no one knew the divine name.)
The fourth question I asked you to consider was “What differences exist between the stories in their report of the length of the flood?

**Length of the Flood**

**J**: rain falls 40 days, then Noah sends out dove 7 days later, sends out again; returns 7 days later, sends out again; does not return
Total: 54 days

**P**: Noah enters on 17th day of 2nd month of his 600th year (7:11)
Emerges on the 27th day of the 2nd month of his 601st year (8:13-14).
Total: 1 year and 10 days

This obsession with precision in reporting dates is characteristic of P.
There are some other, less characteristic differences between P’s and J’s versions of this narrative, such as:

**Other differences**

In J the flood begins 7 days after Noah boards the ark (7:7, 10); in P it begins the very day Noah boards (7:13)
In J Noah sends out a dove (8:8-12), in P a raven (8:7).

But the main point is that this text provides a good example of the sorts of distinctive features and themes that are characteristic of these two sources, as well as a nice example of how two distinct narratives come to be intertwined into one story which, until you think about the details, flows along rather smoothly.

Granted, these are not the sorts of differences one is liable to pick up on a casual reading, but they do begin to rise to the surface when you start attempting to coordinate all the numbers, dates, and events. One of the strengths of the documentary hypothesis is that it accounts for these variations elegantly.

Nevertheless, while this hypothesis provided a rather impressive and dominating solution to the problem of how the Torah, in the form we have it, was composed, in the mid- through latter-decades of the 20th century weighty questions began to surface about the hypothesis, challenging each element of its assertion.

The assertion that we are dealing with distinct documents has become a problem in the case of E, which is presumed to have been largely similar to J, and in any case is virtually impossible to distinguish from J once both begin using the tetagrammaton.

As you’ll recall, E originated in large part to explain the origins of similar stories, termed “doublets” by scholars. As an example of the many such cases in the Torah’s narrative, we looked at the thrice-occurring narrative of a patriarch feigning that his wife was his sister, which would seem to fit nicely the assertion of
the hypothesis that three independent documents that frequently share similar stories, have been conflated. In fact, the first of these three stories is attributed to J, while the second is ascribed to E. One would expect, then, the third story to be aligned with the P source, but such is not the case. On the contrary, this unit is assigned to J, just like 12.11-20. Why? Because this story is inextricably linked to its introduction in vv. 1-5, which includes the following: “Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines. The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, “Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham….So Isaac settled in Gerar.” – Isaac’s sojourn in Gerar, the context of the story, is set up by vv. 1-5, so that vv. 6-11 cannot stand on their own. But the problem for assigning this to either E or P, according to the Documentary Hypothesis, is that these verses contain the name which (according to the hypothesis) does not appear in E and P prior to the narrative of Moses. It must be J.

The version of the story in Genesis 12 likewise uses the name, leading to the conclusion that it, too, must be from J. But the result is that we find two versions of a patriarch passing of his wife as sister in J, one of the problems E was posited to explain.

It’s not that this problem has gone unnoticed by those subscribing to the Documentary Hypothesis, who typically regarded this story – indeed, the whole of chapter 26 – as a unit inserted into the narrative after J, E and P were intertwined. But that already takes us away from the simple explanation of the Torah as a combination of four existing documents by positing additional processes that gave rise to the narrative of the Torah.

More important, however, the need felt to separate this narrative from J because it is a doublet of the story in chapter 12 – attributed to J – betrays a strong presupposition of the documentary hypothesis: namely, that a single document or source would not contain two versions of the same story. But what’s the basis for that assumption?

Indeed, it is clear that whoever combined the various doublets and triplets into the Torah felt no need to exclude a story simply because it was a doublet. Why, then, should the authors of the putative sources have been any more concerned to avoid doublets? And yet, to question that assumption is to challenge a fundamental rationale for the E source.

Recall that E exists only in fragments, and largely only in supposed alternative versions of stories in J. The assumption of the Documentary Hypothesis was that the majority of E’s parallel stories were discarded in favor of J’s stories. But why assume that sources existed that didn’t have different versions of the same story?
And lacking that, much of the reason for E vanishes. And so the assertion of distinct documents is weakest with E, and many now see a distinct source called E as doubtful. Thus, this has become a major objection to the Documentary Hypothesis commonly voiced among scholars today.

Next time I’ll summarize several other objections, as well as alternative explanations being offered about how the Torah was written. With that perspective on scholarship’s approach to this issue, we’ll be ready to start investigating the book of Genesis.