

# BEHOLD THE BIBLE

**Literary Criticism**  
**Historical Criticism**

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## Literary Criticism

- Employs the methods used in studying other literature to analyze biblical books
- Raises questions about plot, theme, structure, genre, irony, etc.
- The question, “what kind of literature is this,” asks about *genre*: what should I expect from this text?

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## Structure of Gen 1:1-2:4

Day 1: light/dark ←→ Day 4: sun, moon, stars  
Day 2: sky/water ←→ Day 5: birds & fish  
Day 3: land/vegetation ←→ Day 6: land animals & humans  
Day 7: rest, *Shabbat*

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### What kind of text has this structure?

- History book?
- Science textbook?
- Poem?
- Hymn?

**Genre questions must be answered first, before theological, historical and other issues of “fact” can even be raised.**

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### History IN the Bible

- Questions of chronology
- Questions of historical possibility
- Reconstructions of political and religious history mentioned in the Bible



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### History OF the Bible

- Questions of date, author, place of origin and intended audience
- Questions about literary sources
- Questions about oral traditions
- Questions about editorial changes and additions to biblical texts



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## Example: Genesis 1-2

### Gen 1:1-2:4

- 7 days of creation
- Style: formal, repetitive
- Sequence: plants, animals, humans
- God: transcendent

### Gen 2:5-25

- Adam & Even in Garden of Eden
- Style: folksy, vivid
- Sequence: man, plants, animals, woman
- God: immanent

Two different stories by different authors?

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## Source Criticism

- Multiple literary sources have been combined to create biblical books
- Evidence:
  - Sometimes sources are cited (Num 21:14-15)
  - Some biblical books use other biblical books word-for-word (Chronicles repeats parts of Kings, Matthew and Luke repeat Mark)
- So sources may also have been used elsewhere

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## The Documentary Hypothesis

- This hypothesis has shaped study of the Hebrew Bible for the last 150 years
- Describes the sources that were used to compose the Pentateuch
- “Pentateuch” = the first five books of the Bible = Torah
  - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

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## Evidence for the Documentary Hypothesis

- Doublets: e.g. 2 creation stories
- Inconsistencies of style and thought: e.g. transcendent theology of Gen 1 vs. immanent theology of Gen 2
- Use of different names/titles for God

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## Digression on the name of God

- In the Hebrew Bible, God's personal name is written *YHWH*
  - Originally probably “Yahweh” or similar
  - The word is never pronounced in Jewish tradition; readers substitute *Adonai* “the Lord” or *ha-Shem* “the name”
- English Bibles print “the LORD” for *YHWH* but “the Lord” for *Adonai*

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## Names of God in Genesis

- Some parts of Genesis use *YHWH* (Gen 2), some use only *Elohim* “God” (Gen 1)
- Exodus 3 & 6 say that God revealed the name *YHWH* for the first time to Moses
- The Documentary Hypothesis concludes:
  - Some sources use *YHWH* only after Moses
  - Others use it from the start

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## Documentary Hypothesis: 4 sources of the Pentateuch

- J “Yahwist” 9<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE
- E “Elohist” 8<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE
- D “Deuteronomy” 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE
- P “Priestly” 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> cents. BCE

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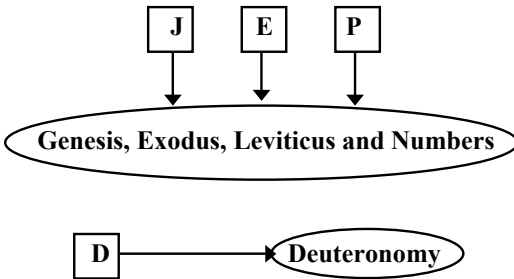
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## Combination of sources in the Pentateuch



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## Evaluation

- The Hypothesis explains some texts better than others (very good on Gen 1-2)
- I think P and D are more obvious than J and especially E
- But the Documentary Hypothesis remains necessary for understanding biblical scholarship of the last 150 years
- It has yet to be convincingly replaced

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