

“The Styles of the Pentateuch” Worksheet

Name: _____
Religion, Kilbridge

Read the following passage from *Biblical Criticism* by Jean Steinmann and answer the questions.

It was the diversity of styles that first led literary critics to suspect the diversity of tradition in the Pentateuch. Clearly it is difficult to appreciate this in a translation, where the style all the way through is the translator’s ... The Bible is liable to turn into a sort of grey porridge, in which everything has the same insipid taste and the same dull, indeterminate colour.

But if we go back to the original, the differences in style between the first two chapters of Genesis are clearly perceptible. The first chapter is written in vague, technical, heavy language. It is the work of a lawyer and a priest. The majesty of the subject is even enhanced by the poverty of the style.

The second chapter is the work of an author with a vivid, precise, lively and humorous style, a poet to his finger-tips. The characters really come to life, and no effort is spared to make a lasting impression on the reader’s mind.

Anyone who goes on to read the rest of Genesis cannot fail to distinguish these two opposing styles: that of the poet with an eye for the picturesque, the striking detail and the majesty of characters on the heroic scale, and that of the jurist (lawyer) obsessed with figures and dates who stuffs his text with theological implications and symbolic meanings.

Modern criticism has found a name for each of these writers. The author of chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis is known as the *Yahwist* (J) and the author of chapter 1 as the *Priest* or *Author of the Priestly Code* (P).

As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century a third hand was traced. A work parallel to the Yahwist’s begins with the account of the calling of Abraham; its author was christened the *Elohist* (E), because he refers to God as Elohim.

Finally, Deuteronomy (Deuteromist - D) was clearly an autonomous entity. Its enthusiastic, redundant style, full of exhortations and prophecy, is quite different from the Yahwist, Elohist and Priestly styles.

It was soon recognized that the Yahwist, Elohist, and Priestly narratives were present in Exodus and Numbers; and the hand of the author of Deuteronomy was also traced in the later historical books.

1. What initially led scholars to suspect that more than one person had written the Pentateuch?

2. Complete the following table:

Writer	Style	Sample Books and Chapters
Yahwist (J)		
Priestly (P)		
Elohist (E)		
Deuteronomist (D)		

The Documentary Hypothesis: *Worksheet*

Using *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, you are to complete this sheet on the sources of the Pentateuch.

The J Document:

When and where was it written and under what circumstances?

What is the style and tone?

The E Document:

When and where was it written and under what circumstances?

What is the style and tone?

How does God reveal Himself to humans?

Provide an example of E's stress on the cult.

The D Document:

When and where was it written and under what circumstances?

What passage in II Kings tells of the discovery of the Deuteronomic Code? Explain the story of its discovery.

What is the style and tone?

The P Document:

When and where was it written and under what circumstances?

What is the style, tone and purpose?

