

# Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis

*Kevin L. Barney*

THE EDITORS OF *DIALOGUE* have invited me to respond to Thomas Dozeman's article, "The Authorship of the Pentateuch," which appeared in the previous issue.<sup>1</sup> The development of the Documentary Hypothesis is a fascinating chapter in intellectual history from the pre-critical observations of certain rabbis and philosophers concerning anomalies in the text to the rigorous studies of modern Bible scholars over the last several centuries. From the time of Wellhausen<sup>2</sup> in the latter part of the 19th century to the present at the tail end of the 20th century, the Documentary Hypothesis (or some form thereof) has been the dominant scholarly view of Pentateuchal origins. As the Mormon encounter with the Documentary Hypothesis has for all practical purposes been a 20th-century experience, it seems proper at the end of the century to reflect on where we have been and where we might go with respect to the issue of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

While Dozeman's essay does not directly address Mormon literature or uniquely Mormon concerns, it nevertheless provides an essential grounding in the basic development of the Documentary Hypothesis and the reasons underlying its wide acceptance. Dozeman explains these matters

---

1. Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Authorship of the Pentateuch," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 87-112.

2. For his most influential work, see Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (originally 1883; reprinted with an English translation by Menzies and Black as *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* [New York: Meridian Books, 1957]), which Dozeman cites on 97 n44. Dozeman is careful not to heap too much credit on Wellhausen, for while his influence is unquestioned, little of what he did was truly original. Rather, he synthesized the work of prior scholars, such as Karl H. Graf, *Die geschichtlichen Bücher des AT: Zwei historisch-kritische Untersuchungen* (1865). I will occasionally refer to the classic formulation of the theory by Wellhausen as the "Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis." I intend the expression "Documentary Hypothesis" to be somewhat broader, including variations from the classical Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis scholars have introduced over the last century.

about as clearly as it is possible to do in a concise article meant for a general readership. To refresh the reader's recollection, according to the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis in its classic form, the Pentateuch derives from four documentary sources (thus, the alternate name "Documentary Hypothesis"): (1) a Yahwist (J) source, written in the south (Judah) in early monarchical times, (2) an Elohist (E) source, written in the north (Israel) somewhat later (these two sources being combined at some point, a combination referred to as JE), (3) a Deuteronomic (D) source, understood as the book of the law found in the temple during the Josianic reforms in 621 B.C.E., and (4) a Priestly (P) source, which was originally thought to be post-Exilic. These four sources were then combined by a Redactor (R) to form the Pentateuch in the form we know it today. In the discussion that follows, I will assume that the reader has first read Dozeman and is, therefore, familiar with the theory and its development. This will free me to concentrate on the Mormon side of the issue. I will begin by briefly reviewing the spectrum of Mormon reactions to the hypothesis over the past century. The remainder of the paper will then articulate some of my own reflections concerning the theory. I will explore what is at stake in terms of faith commitments if one does accept the theory. I will share some reservations I feel over accepting the hypothesis, as well as some reasons one might legitimately reject it. Next I will explain why I tentatively accept the theory. And finally I will illustrate the critical use of the theory in a faithful exploration of Mormon scripture.

#### OVERVIEW OF LDS REACTIONS

The ground work for a review of where we have come with respect to the Documentary Hypothesis has been laid by a chapter entitled "The Mormon Response to Higher Criticism" in Philip Barlow's book *Mormons and the Bible*.<sup>3</sup> Barlow observes that the Latter-day Saints had (and continue to have) within their tradition the resources to respond either positively or negatively to the scholarship that gave rise to the Documentary Hypothesis. On the one hand, Joseph Smith clearly recognized the Bible's limitations; rather than assume biblical inerrancy, he experimented liberally with scripture. Brigham Young, although he repeatedly asserted his biblical allegiance, emphasized the circumstantial and progressive nature of revelation, dismissing parts of the Bible as fables or "baby stories," and noting that, in writing of the creation, Moses adapted the traditions he had inherited from the fathers. On the other hand, the Mormons had brought with them a legacy of biblical literalism from Protestantism, which was often reinforced by modern scripture.<sup>4</sup>

---

3. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 103-147.

4. *Ibid.*, 109-10.

Focusing on the first half of the 20th century, Barlow sees a spectrum of responses to higher criticism flowing from these Mormon attitudes toward scripture. On the left, represented by William H. Chamberlin, is enthusiastic acceptance. On the right, represented by Joseph Fielding Smith, is a rejection in the strongest terms of the whole scholarly critical enterprise. And in the middle, represented by B. H. Roberts, is an acceptance in principle of the scholarly critical enterprise, but combined with a rejection of many of its results in this particular case. Represented graphically:

Mormon Responses to Higher Criticism (first half of 20th century)

<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Centrist</i>	<i>Conservative</i>
William H. Chamberlin	B. H. Roberts	Joseph Fielding Smith

Of course, we must be cautious in applying this sketch of early 20th century Mormon reactions to something generally referred to as “higher criticism” specifically to the Documentary Hypothesis itself. J. G. Eichorn coined the expression “higher criticism” in order to distinguish broad literary-historical criticism from narrow textual or “lower” criticism, which is devoted to the study of variant textual readings. A less appealing name than “higher criticism” could scarcely have been coined if one had tried. The modifier “higher” suggests an immodest haughtiness, and the noun “criticism” suggests an inherently negative, destructive critique of traditional views.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, “higher criticism” became a convenient (if generic) rhetorical whipping boy over many an early 20th-century pulpit. Further, while the Documentary Hypothesis was no doubt the first fruits of higher criticism, higher criticism has had a much broader reach than that theory alone. These cautions notwithstanding, Barlow’s study of early 20th-century Mormon responses to higher criticism provides a useful framework for our own review of 20th-century Mormon attitudes towards the Documentary Hypothesis.

The usual *terminus a quo* for any consideration of the Mormon encounter with higher criticism is William H. Chamberlin and the 1911 evolution crisis at BYU.<sup>6</sup> After a modest early education, Chamberlin graduated

---

5. Cf. *ibid.*, 124. When the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) published a three-volume “critical text” of the Book of Mormon (*Book of Mormon Critical Text: A Tool for Scholarly Reference* [FARMS, 1986]), meaning a text that reports variant readings in different manuscripts and editions, the wire services duly reported that FARMS had published a “text critical of” the Book of Mormon. While scholars are accustomed to using the word “criticism” as referring to the exercise of careful judgment and judicious evaluation in analyzing works of art or literature, to the lay person the word has an inherently negative and, therefore, antagonistic tone.

6. See *ibid.*, 129-34; Richard Sherlock, “Campus in Crisis: BYU: 1911,” *Sunstone* 4 (January/February 1979): 10-16; and Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 134-71. Although there were

in science from the University of Utah, obtained a master's degree in philosophy from the University of California, studied ancient languages and biblical criticism at the University of Chicago, and spent two years pursuing a Ph.D. in philosophy at Harvard until he was compelled to suspend his studies there due to poor health. Chamberlin followed his brother Ralph to a teaching job at BYU; while there, he included in his teaching higher criticism of the Bible. In 1911 Ralph Chamberlin and Joseph and Henry Peterson left the university under duress, primarily for teaching evolution, but secondarily for accepting and teaching higher critical theories of the origins of the Bible (presumably including the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis). William continued at BYU for a few years longer, but eventually he also was effectively forced to resign. Although Chamberlin did not really publish on the subject, the influence of his teaching was substantial and lasting. For example, E. E. Erickson was profoundly influenced by Chamberlin, and Sterling McMurrin in turn was profoundly influenced by both Chamberlin and Erickson.<sup>7</sup>

A second example of a Mormon educator who embraced the Documentary Hypothesis is Heber C. Snell. Snell, who had been a student at BYU during the difficulties of 1911, received a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1932 and taught at the Institute of Religion in Logan. His book *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning* assumes the Documentary Hypothesis to be correct.<sup>8</sup> The book was originally commissioned to be published by the church for use by LDS college students, but Joseph Fielding Smith led a successful campaign to prevent church publication of the book.<sup>9</sup>

Joseph Fielding Smith represented the opposite side of the spectrum from Chamberlin and Snell. Smith was a long-time apostle (serving in that capacity since 1910), church historian, and respected scriptionist, who eventually became president of the church a couple of years before his death in 1972. As a scriptionist, Smith was very much a literalist. Although he un-

---

some earlier statements relating to the theory made by George Reynolds and others, because of its notoriety and influence, the 1911 evolution crisis at BYU represents a convenient starting point.

7. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 139. Others influenced by Chamberlin included Carl F. Eyring, Wilford Poulsen, Hugh H. Woodward, Thomas L. Martin, William J. Snow, B. F. Larson, Vasco M. Tanner and Russell Swensen (*ibid.*, 140 n87). For Chamberlin's influence on Erickson, see E. E. Erickson, "William H. Chamberlin: Pioneer Utah Philosopher," *Western Humanities Review* 8 (1954): 4. For a summary of his philosophy, see James M. McLachlan, "W. H. Chamberlin and the Quest for a Mormon Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 151-67.

8. Heber C. Snell, *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1948); see especially p. 5 at the outset of chapter two ("The Genesis Story of Beginnings") where Snell gives a matter-of-fact description of the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis, describing it as "the best available information."

9. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 140-41, and Richard Sherlock, "Faith and History: The Snell Controversy," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 27-41.

derstood the basics of the Documentary Hypothesis, he viewed not only that theory, but all higher critical endeavors as essentially evil, as a conspiracy “launched on the part of certain scholars to tear asunder and destroy the authenticity of the holy scriptures.”<sup>10</sup>

Representing the middle ground was B. H. Roberts, who was widely considered to be the church’s leading intellectual in the first part of the century. As Barlow puts it, “Roberts believed that revealed truths must be reconciled with facts demonstrated by science and other means.”<sup>11</sup> Roberts famously wrote that:

the methods of higher criticism are legitimate, that is to say, it is right to consider the various books of the scriptures . . . as a body of literature, and to examine them internally, and go into the circumstances under which they were written, and the time at which they were written, and the purpose for which they were written.<sup>12</sup>

While Roberts was sympathetic to the methods of higher criticism, he often disagreed with the results obtained by the higher critics. He rejected the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis, but not completely. In Roberts’s view, Moses wrote the Pentateuch, but he may have used preexisting sources, and Ezra or Nehemiah may have edited his work to make it more intelligible to post-Exilic Jews.<sup>13</sup>

A second example from the middle of the spectrum is Sidney B. Sperry, who received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1931<sup>14</sup> and had a long career at BYU as an Old Testament scholar. Sperry consistently insisted on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.<sup>15</sup> As Sperry was more dogmatic and less nuanced on this point than Roberts, Barlow sees him as perhaps a half step to the right of Roberts, yet insists that both occupy the middle ground, as the center of the spectrum had shifted to the right since Roberts’s day.<sup>16</sup>

As we now update Barlow’s analysis of the Mormon reaction to higher criticism in the first half of the 20th century to include the second half as well (focusing on reactions to the Documentary Hypothesis in particular and not necessarily on those to higher criticism in general), to my perception the spectrum has broadened somewhat. I have attempted in the fol-

10. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 490, quoted in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 125.

11. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 113-14.

12. B. H. Roberts, “Higher Criticism and the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era* 14 (June 1911): 667-68.

13. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 117.

14. See Russell Swensen, “Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 34-47.

15. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 142.

16. *Ibid.*, 143.

lowing table to represent graphically my perception of Mormon reactions to the Documentary Hypothesis over the 20th century:

### Mormon Responses to the Documentary Hypothesis (20th century)

Scholarly				Traditional	
Secularist			Supernaturalist		
Liberal		Centrist		Conservative	
1	2	3	4	5	6
David P. Wright	William H. Chamberlin	John A. Widtsoe	B. H. Roberts	[majority]	Joseph Fielding Smith
Anthony Hutchinson	Heber C. Snell	John L. Sorenson	Sidney B. Sperry		J. Reuben Clark, Jr.
Keith Norman		S. Kent Brown	George Reynolds		Bruce R. McConkie
William Russell		Robert F. Smith	Janne M. Sjodahl		Mark E. Peterson
Melodie Moench Charles		Scott Kenney	J. E. Homans		
O. Kendall White, Jr.		Alan Goff	A. A. Ramseyer		
		Bruce Pritchett	Hugh Nibley		
		Kevin L. Barney	Anonymous ( <i>Sunstone</i> )		
			Kevin Christensen		

By splitting each of Barlow's original three categories into two subcategories, we can better visualize the full breadth of the spectrum.<sup>17</sup>

The early liberal position, which I view (perhaps because of its original pairing with evolution) as in large measure a simple embrace of the progress of modern science, is represented by category 2. While I believe, based on internet postings I have seen, that there continue to be 2s around, in the second half of the century, most of those articulating the liberal position seem to have moved a half step further to the left. The particular distinction I see is a greater willingness to follow higher criticism no matter where it leads, including the rejection of historically based faith claims. This more recent liberal position I have designated category 1.

17. This categorization is subject to the following limitations: (a) it is meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive; (b) although I have used names as a shorthand, in the case of those still living it is meant to categorize publications rather than individuals (certainly on an issue like this people can and do change their positions over time); and (c) there remain variations in belief and approach within each broad category. I apologize if any of the individuals named feel that I have miscategorized his or her writings; the categorization is, of course, very subjective and represents my own reaction to the writings I reviewed.

Illustrative of category 1 is an essay by David P. Wright entitled "Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth."<sup>18</sup> Wright describes traditionalist and critical modes of studying the scriptures, and he recounts his own conversion from the former to the latter. Although he does not use the Documentary Hypothesis as a principal example in this, he does mention it in passing and makes it clear he accepts it.<sup>19</sup> The critical methodology he accepts leads him to reject the historicity of the Book of Mormon as an ancient document.<sup>20</sup> This willingness to abandon historically based faith claims is the distinguishing characteristic of my category 1. In place of those faith claims he rejects, he articulates a "post-critical apologetic" that allows him to maintain a connection with his LDS religious tradition.

Wright's views were later critiqued by William J. Hamblin, who argued that Wright's dichotomy between traditionalist and critical modes was a false one.<sup>21</sup> The real dichotomy, according to Hamblin, is between secularist and supernaturalist paradigms (a suggestion I have reflected graphically in the table above). Wright, in his response,<sup>22</sup> pointed out that many faithful LDS scholars in the supernaturalist camp nevertheless show certain secularist tendencies; he asks where the line is to be drawn for these scholars between the secular and the supernatural, which strikes me as a fair question to ask and a difficult one to answer. On the other hand, it seems to me that Wright never successfully responds to Hamblin's observation that Wright's methodology would seem of necessity to entail the rejection not only of the reality of the First Vision and the historicity of the Book of Mormon, but also of the divine sonship of Jesus Christ and his physical resurrection. Although this thought provoking debate is chiefly over methodological issues, it provides important background for a consideration of an issue such as the Documentary Hypothesis.<sup>23</sup>

A second illustration from category 1 is provided by the writings of

---

18. In *Sunstone* 16, no. 2 (September 1992): 28-38.18.

19. *ibid.*, 34n54, he offers basic bibliography on the point.

20. See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 141n91-42.

21. William J. Hamblin, "The Final Step," *Sunstone* 16, no. 5 (July 1993): 11-12.

22. David P. Wright, "The Continuing Journey," *Sunstone* 16, no.5 (July 1993): 12-14.

23. The same issue of *Sunstone* that contained the Hamblin-Wright debate had a couple of letters to the editor responding to Wright's original essay. Michael Rayback (8), writing as a social conservative who had undergone his own conversion to an historical critical orientation, praised Wright's article. The well known Judaica scholar Jacob Neusner (7-8) expressed surprise that Wright's piece had not engaged the vast literature devoted to the problem that concerned him and judged his article to be naive. An additional critique of Wright is found in John Gee, "La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 51-120, esp. 59-64. Kevin Christensen also wrote a response to Wright; I consider his article separately under my discussion of category 4 below.

Anthony Hutchinson. In his "LDS Approaches to the Holy Bible,"<sup>24</sup> he articulates a typology of various approaches of LDS scholars to the Bible.<sup>25</sup> Although he does not directly address the Documentary Hypothesis in this paper, he makes it clear that he favors his Group IV, which he characterizes as "Critical Historical and Philological Hermeneutic." Those in this category would tend to be those most open to an acceptance of the Documentary Hypothesis.<sup>26</sup>

In a later article, "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered,"<sup>27</sup> Hutchinson gives extensive attention to the Documentary Hypothesis. Hutchinson analyzes the creation narratives in the King James Version (KJV), the Book of Moses, the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), the Book of Abraham, and the temple endowment, seeing the accounts deriving from Joseph Smith as products of a process of midrashic embellishment of the KJV. In the first half of this article, Hutchinson has frequent occasion to refer to and use the Documentary Hypothesis. He describes different understandings of God in the JEP traditions (13), the possibility of "pious fraud," as suggested by de Wette and Wellhausen in connection with the discovery of the book of the law (D) in the temple (17), basic sources for further study of the Documentary Hypothesis together with a rejection of the findings of the Genesis Project based on statistical linguistics (19), a description of the Priestly account of the creation (21-24), and a description of the Yahwist account of the creation (24-30). Finally, he uses the Documentary Hypothesis as a critical tool in analyzing Joseph Smith's treatment of the "P-J seam" in Genesis 2:1-9 (31-41). We shall return to the issue of statistical linguistics

---

24. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 99-124.

25. His four categories, together with representative examples, are as follows: Group I, Harmonizing Hermeneutic (Joseph Fielding Smith, Bruce R. McConkie, W. Cleon Skousen, Glenn L. Pearson, Monte S. Nyman, Mark E. Peterson, and D. S. Crowther); Group II, Critically Modified Harmonizing Hermeneutic (B. H. Roberts, James Talmage, Sidney Sperry, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Robert J. Matthews, Keith Meservy, Gerald Lund, and Ellis Rasmussen); Group III, Critical Hermeneutic with Corrective Tendencies (Hugh W. Nibley, C. Wilfred Griggs, Thomas W. Mackay, S. Kent Brown, Richard L. Anderson, and Benjamin Urrutia); and Group IV, Critical Hermeneutic (William H. Chamberlin, Ephraim E. Erickson, Heber C. Snell, Russell Swensen, Sterling McMurrin, John Sorenson, Lowell Bennion, Scott Kenney, Melodie Moench Charles, Richard Sherlock, Michael T. Walton, Edward Ashment, and Keith Norman).

26. My 6-category scheme above is in some sense inspired by Hutchinson's typology. Hutchinson's general typology relates to my more specific groupings with respect to attitudes towards the Documentary Hypothesis as follows:

Hutchinson Group No.	Barney Category No.
I	6, 5
II	5, 4
III	4, 3
IV	2, 1

27. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 11-74.

later in this article. For present purposes, it is sufficient to show that this is an LDS writer who understands and accepts the Documentary Hypothesis and uses it as a critical tool in seeking to understand LDS scripture.<sup>28</sup>

In the midst of a commentary on the mythopoeic elements of the Genesis creation accounts, Keith Norman also gives an introduction to source criticism and uses it as a critical tool in his analysis.<sup>29</sup> Like Hutchinson, Norman explains the differences between the P and J accounts of the creation in the opening chapters of Genesis, showing how the KJV obscures the P-J seam at Genesis 2:4. Norman also points out that, although the traditional ascription of the Pentateuch to Moses is no longer tenable among scholars, much of the oral, if not written, tradition used by the later authors can be traced back to Moses' time or even earlier (85). Norman then goes on to compare the mythic elements of Genesis with earlier myths from Mesopotamia, Babylon, Egypt, and Canaan.

RLDS scholar William D. Russell's essay entitled "Beyond Literalism"<sup>30</sup> is essentially a brief arguing for a greater attention to critical scholarship in both the LDS and RLDS traditions. Russell has occasion to mention the differences between P and J in Genesis 1-2 (45) as well as the views of Snell, Chamberlin, and Sperry towards higher criticism (48-49).<sup>31</sup>

The antipathy of the right side of the scale toward higher criticism and the Documentary Hypothesis is well known and may be illustrated by the fact that in his *Mormon Doctrine*, Bruce R. McConkie cross-referenced

28. Like Wright, based on his critical approach to scripture, Hutchinson argues that the Book of Mormon, while scripture indeed, should no longer be considered by Latter-day Saints to have an historical basis among ancient peoples of the Americas. See Anthony A. Hutchinson, "The Word of God is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture," in Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 1-19. While I agree with much that Hutchinson has to say in his earlier articles, I do not follow him here. This perhaps reflects my own world view as belonging to Group III on his typology, while he belongs to Group IV. For me, the probing questions raised by John W. Welch, "Approaching New Approaches," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 145-86, in a section entitled "Postscript: Questioning the Ahistorical Approach" (181-86), have the greater resonance.

29. Keith E. Norman, "Adam's Navel," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 81-97.

30. William D. Russell, "Beyond Literalism," in Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 43-54. This essay originally appeared in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 57-68.

31. O. Kendall White, Jr., in "The Church and the Community: Personal Reflections on Mormon Intellectual Life," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 84-91, tells a story of teaching a college-age Sunday School class about "higher" and "lower" biblical criticism. Although he was specifically addressing New Testament criticism at the time, one gets the strong impression that he similarly embraces the Documentary Hypothesis. I have somewhat speculatively included him on the table above, based on this article.

"Higher Criticism" to "Apostasy."<sup>32</sup> This is category 6, which is characterized by a very strong rejection not only of the Documentary Hypothesis itself, but of critical scholarship in general. In contrast, category 5 represents those who do not affirmatively reject the Documentary Hypothesis, but simply are ignorant of it. Rather than listing names for this category, I have simply indicated that it is the category under which the vast majority of the Saints would fall.<sup>33</sup> In order to confirm the predominance of category 5 in the church, I took an informal poll in my ward's Gospel Doctrine class one Sunday. None of the 28 students present had so much as heard of the Documentary Hypothesis.<sup>34</sup>

The centrist position of Roberts and Sperry, which acknowledges the value of scholarship but questions its results on this issue (category 4), is of the longest standing and continues to be a very vibrant point of view among the Saints. Probably the earliest LDS reaction to the hypothesis—by George Reynolds in 1881—can be categorized here.<sup>35</sup> The continued strength of this position is suggested by the 1979 edition of the LDS King James Version,<sup>36</sup> which basically adopts the Roberts view that Moses wrote the Pentateuch based on several documentary sources, and acknowledges the influence of scribes and copyists (as for instance with respect to the explanation of Moses' supposed death).

Janne M. Sjodahl gives an impressive (if concise) summary of the development of the Documentary Hypothesis, invoking the names of Hobbes, Spinoza, Astruc, Eichorn, de Wette, Ewald, Graf, Kuenen, Davidson, Driver, Briggs, and Wellhausen.<sup>37</sup> He then concludes, however, that the theory is wrong, based on Nephi's mention of the "five books of Moses," which Sjodahl calls Nephi's "testimony to a skeptical world."<sup>38</sup>

---

32. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 353-55; cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 185-94. The attitude of J. Reuben Clark, Jr., is reflected in his *Why the King James Version?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956); cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 158-81, and that of Mark E. Peterson is reflected in his *Moses: Man of Miracles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977). Other names could be added to this list, such as Orson F. Whitney, J. Golden Kimball, and Spencer W. Kimball, but their criticisms of higher criticism are more generic and betray no indication that they had specific knowledge about the Documentary Hypothesis.

33. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 135, 146-47, acknowledges that most Saints have no knowledge of higher criticism in general, much less the Documentary Hypothesis in particular.

34. The poll was conducted on May 7, 2000, in the Gospel Doctrine class of the Schaumburg First Ward, Schaumburg Illinois Stake, northwest of Chicago. Several class members volunteered that they knew what the Pentateuch was.

35. George Reynolds, "Thoughts on Genesis," *The Contributor* 3 (October 1881): 16-17.

36. In the Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Pentateuch," 748.

37. In *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927), 200-02.

38. For a similar approach, see A. A. Ramseyer, "Who Wrote the Pentateuch?" *Improvement Era* 9 (April 1908): 437-42.

James Edward Homans, who wrote under the pen name of Robert C. Webb, wrote two of the more sophisticated efforts along these lines.<sup>39</sup> Although Homans was not LDS, he often wrote essays such as these for the *Improvement Era*, so it seems proper to include his contributions here.

Hugh Nibley did not accept the Documentary Hypothesis in his writings. He does not, however, appear to have made the hypothesis a matter of independent study; rather, his views appear to have been dependent on those of the noted non-LDS scholar Cyrus Gordon.<sup>40</sup> This underscores a point made by Hamblin,<sup>41</sup> to the effect that most people, no matter what their orientation, “base their conclusions about scripture and history not on a first-hand knowledge of the evidence or analysis, but on authority.” Hamblin points out that relatively few have the critical tools, such as knowledge of biblical languages, to be able to engage the evidence directly. Nibley’s reliance on Gordon demonstrates that even those with the critical tools often rely on the authority of others whom they trust on many issues; there simply is not enough time for a scholar individually to investigate every issue that may interest him or her.

An anonymously authored Sunday School Supplement in *Sunstone* specifically addressed the Documentary Hypothesis.<sup>42</sup> This article traces the basics of the development of the theory. It suggests, however, that it is reasonable to consider Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, and the author opines that this is the preferable position. The piece ends with separate bibliographies for the Documentary Hypothesis and for the hypothesis of Mosaic authorship. Melodie Moench Charles wrote a letter calling the publication of this supplement “unfortunate” and posing a number of difficulties with Mosaic authorship.<sup>43</sup>

Kevin Christensen, in his response<sup>44</sup> to Wright’s *Sunstone* article, uses

39. R. C. Webb, “What is the Higher Criticism?” *Improvement Era* 19 (May 1916): 620-26, and “Criticism of the Higher Critics,” *Improvement Era* 19 (June 1916): 706-13.

40. See Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 25, reprinted by FARMS as vol. 7 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 22-23, where Nibley quotes Gordon as writing “Though Bible scholars live in an age of unprecedented discovery, they stand in the shadow of nineteenth-century higher criticism, . . . even though archaeology has rendered it untenable” (in Cyrus H. Gordon, “Higher Critics and Forbidden Fruit,” *Christianity Today* 4 (1959): 131); *ibid.*, 435n110: “No one questions that Hammurabi’s Code is a single composition in spite of the fact that the prologue and epilogue are not only written in poetry (as opposed to the prose of the laws) but in different dialect from the laws, because the poetry calls not only for a different style but even for different grammatical forms.” (Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1949], 7, discussing other cases as well).

41. In “The Final Step,” 12.

42. “The Pentateuch and Modern Scholarship,” *Sunstone* 5, no. 6 (November 1980): 61-63.

43. In Reader’s Forum, *Sunstone* 6, no.1 (January 1981): 4. I have included Charles in my categorization above based on this letter.

44. “A Response to David Wright on Historical Criticism,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 74-93, esp. 78-80.

the Documentary Hypothesis to make a point. Wright had remarked that in historical (*i.e.*, fundamentalist) mode conclusions in many respects are “predetermined”; Christensen responds that “the same could be said of his critical mode to the extent that the critical scholar’s tools and methods have been devised to solve problems within that paradigm.” To illustrate, he compares the conventional treatment of the Documentary Hypothesis in Richard Friedman’s *Who Wrote the Bible?*<sup>45</sup> with another book, published the same year, that challenges that hypothesis: Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn’s *Before Abraham Was*.<sup>46</sup> Where Friedman shows the traditional seams between P and J in the Noah account of Genesis, Kikawada and Quinn show the same material in what appears to be a unified chiasmic structure. We will return to the issue of chiasmus later. At this point I simply wish to share a quote from Christensen, which in my view articulates the ideal of category 4:

However, in rejecting the conclusions of two generations of “critical” scholars, Kikawada and Quinn do not reject the ideals or fruits of scholarship. Theirs is not an anti-intellectual approach, but an attempt to define an alternate paradigm that is more accurate, more comprehensive and coherent, more fruitful and promising.<sup>47</sup>

As Barlow originally observed, the influential Harvard-and-Göttingen-educated apostle John A. Widtsoe seemed to hold a position on the spectrum ambiguously between that of Chamberlin and Roberts.<sup>48</sup> Widtsoe stated that there could be no objection to the critical study of the Bible, as long as it is a legitimate search for truth and not a mere exercise in negativism.<sup>49</sup> Higher criticism is not to be feared by Latter-day Saints. He acknowledged many of the conclusions of the higher critics, such as the Documentary Hypothesis, but he also stressed the provisional and tentative nature of the critical enterprise: “The purpose of Higher Criticism may be acceptable; but its limitations must ever be kept in mind . . . .”<sup>50</sup> Given the

---

45. Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), which Dozeman cites at 99n53.

46. Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989).

47. Christensen, “Response to David Wright,” 80. Note that Christensen also mentions Kikawada and Quinn’s critique of the Documentary Hypothesis in passing in his review of Anthony Hutchinson’s “A Mormon Midrash?” See Kevin Christensen, “New Wine and New Bottles: Scriptural Scholarship as Sacrament,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 121-29, on 122.

48. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 135.

49. See John A. Widtsoe, *In Search of Truth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1930), 81-93, and *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 97-101, excerpts from which are reprinted as an epilogue in Vogel, *The Word of God*, 265-67.

50. *Ibid.*, 266.

nature of the inquiry, he opined that the conclusions of higher criticism might always remain in the realm of hypothesis.

Widtsoe's position laid the foundation for what has become category 3. Category 3 is close to category 4, but is distinguished by a greater openness to accepting the Documentary Hypothesis, or at least parts of it, and a willingness to use it as a critical tool. Category 3 is distinguished from category 2 by its emphasis on the tenuousness of the hypothesis.

While Widtsoe seemed to hold this ground alone in the first half of the century, in the last quarter of the century several LDS scholars have followed in his footsteps. In a groundbreaking study, John Sorenson used the Documentary Hypothesis as a critical tool in examining the origins of the brass plates spoken of in the Book of Mormon.<sup>51</sup> As is obligatory in such works, Sorenson describes the basics of the hypothesis. He then describes the increased scholarly skepticism about the hypothesis that arose in the 1930's based on biblical archaeology (which we shall address further below). Yet, despite the problems, scholars still believed the 19th century scholarship was correct in assigning different blocks of material corresponding roughly to what is designated J, E, D, and P in the Pentateuch. Sorenson quotes Clyde Francisco (who in turn is quoting C. R. North) with a succinct statement of the matter: "It seems quite clear that if we bury the 'documents,' we shall have to resurrect them—or something very much like them."<sup>52</sup>

Sorenson notes that most previous LDS treatments had been needlessly defensive. He goes on to state as his thesis that the variant Old Testament text of the brass plates corresponds to one of the "documents" from which the Pentateuch was compiled. In particular, he suggests E for this role, due to its origins in the north, the ancestral home of Lehi, and for other reasons. The argument is of course speculative, and it should be noted that not all scholars today continue to acknowledge the existence of a separate E source. Nevertheless, I view Sorenson's work as a model for category 3 scholarship. Like Widtsoe, he shows no fear of the hypothesis; going beyond Widtsoe, he uses the hypothesis as a critical tool in seeking to elaborate and understand Mormon scripture.<sup>53</sup>

S. Kent Brown wrote an excellent, if brief, survey of the Documentary Hypothesis for an LDS audience that was published in 1985.<sup>54</sup> Like Widt-

51. John L. Sorenson, "The Brass Plates and Modern Scholarship," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 4 (Autumn 1977): 31-39.

52. *Ibid.*, 32.

53. I have included Robert F. Smith under category 3 based on an unpublished paper he wrote, cited by Sorenson, entitled "A Documentary Analysis of the Book of Abraham." Although Smith is to my knowledge not LDS, I include him here on the same basis as my inclusion of Homans under category 4.

54. S. Kent Brown, "Approaches to the Pentateuch," in Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, eds., *Studies in Scripture: Volume Three, Genesis to 2 Samuel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 13-23.

soe, Brown is rather coy about just how much or how little of the hypothesis he might accept. But his familiarity with the scholarship and control of the literature give him the same lack of fear and defensiveness displayed by Widtsoe and Sorenson, which I see as a major attribute of category 3.<sup>55</sup>

Scott Kenney wrote a fine, positive introduction to the Documentary Hypothesis, focusing in particular on the flood narrative. He makes the point that the *History of the Church* was compiled in a similar fashion, with material from different sources redacted together as a single narrative, as if told from the perspective of Joseph Smith. Kenney concludes that "biblical scholarship can illuminate elements of that revelatory process that have long been ignored by Latter-day Saints."<sup>56</sup>

A more recent illustration of category 3 scholarship is Bruce Pritchett's study of pre-Exilic and Exilic references to the fall of Adam in the Old Testament.<sup>57</sup> Pritchett alludes to possible problems with the Documentary Hypothesis based on the Genesis Project (discussed below).<sup>58</sup> He nevertheless uses the hypothesis as a critical tool in analyzing the development of the Paradise narrative, identifying traditional, Yahwistic, and Priestly stages of development.

Alan Goff reports that he frequently finds a consonance between biblical criticism, including higher criticism, and his readings of the Book of Mormon. Although he does not directly address the Documentary Hypothesis, he uses it comfortably as a critical tool in his study of that book.<sup>59</sup>

This brief survey<sup>60</sup> of 20th-century Mormon reactions to the Documentary Hypothesis shows a modest trend back towards the left side of the spectrum. Although category 1 flows from category 2, it seems to me that

55. A minor clarification to Brown's essay: He describes a theory that the phrase "these are the generations of . . ." in Genesis constitutes the closing line of a family history and that the phrase may have appeared at the end of each of a series of 11 successive tablets. I agree with him that this is an intriguing suggestion. He relates the theory as having been proposed by R. K. Harrison; while Harrison does describe the theory in some detail, his own footnotes make it clear that Harrison is following D. J. Wiseman here. See Roland Kenneth Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 548.

56. Scott Kenney, "Mormons, Genesis & Higher Criticism," *Sunstone* 3, no. 1 (November 1977): 8-12, on 12. I note here that Daniel H. Rector also commented on the Documentary Hypothesis in "Future for Mormon Theology," *Sunstone* 11, no. 3 (May 1987): 4-5, but not in sufficient detail for me to categorize his views (his comment went to the temporary halt the hypothesis put to the notion of a "biblical theology").

57. Bruce M. Pritchett, Jr., "Lehi's Theology of the Fall in Its Preexilic/Exilic Context," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 49-83.

58. *Ibid.*, 54.

59. Alan Goff, "Boats, Beginnings and Repetitions," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 67-84.

60. We should also take note of Brett DelPorto's review of Harold Bloom's *The Book of J* in "Harold Bloom's Ironic, Female, Co-Author of the Bible," *Sunstone* 15, no. 1 (April 1991): 56-59.

the more recent liberal position with its rejection of historical faith claims is somewhat further to the left than the original liberal position. On the right, no doubt category 6 continues to be a position held by many, but the passing of the conservative titans who established that category has left a situation wherein there is little public comment by church leaders attacking higher criticism today. In the absence of such attacks, the vast majority of the membership of the church simply makes traditional assumptions (category 5) in ignorance that there is an issue possibly calling those assumptions into question. In the middle, category 4 continues its strength as an alternative to the extreme views on the left and the right. In addition, category 3 has developed out of category 4, displaying a greater willingness to accept the Documentary Hypothesis and to use it as a critical tool.

The astute reader will note that I have listed myself on the table under category 3. I do accept the theory, or at least portions of it, for reasons that I will describe in greater detail below. As a working model, I accept the hypothesis in the form articulated by Richard Friedman, which includes retention of an early date for J, retention of a separate E, and an understanding of P as predating D. I am well aware, however, that just because I find Friedman to be the most articulate exponent of the theory, this does not necessarily make him right in his views. Furthermore, the farther we move away from the differentiation of discrete blocks of material toward microsurgery on individual verses, the more agnostic I become on the ability of the hypothesis to support such fine distinctions. I similarly tend toward a certain agnosticism on dating issues; I find the various arguments over dating to be the weakest parts of the theory.

The remainder of this essay will be a reflection on some of my own views concerning the Documentary Hypothesis. I believe the church is wise to allow for a broad spectrum of belief on this issue, and I have no particular interest in proselytizing anyone to my way of thinking. Nevertheless, as a centrist it may be useful for me to share some of my ruminations on the theory. I personally do not find category 6 appealing, and since I know about the theory, category 5 is for me not possible. But I do feel the pull both of category 4 to my right and categories 1 and 2 to my left.

I will begin by asking the question "What is at stake?" in terms of faith commitments if one does accept the theory. As a 3, I happen to believe that it is possible to accept the hypothesis without unduly compromising one's religious beliefs (assuming that those beliefs are not fundamentalist and reflect a certain flexibility and liberality). Another characteristic of 3s is their emphasis on the tentativeness of the hypothesis; in the next section I will share some of the misgivings I feel about accepting the hypothesis, as well as some of the reasons that acceptance for me is not set in stone. Next, I will explain why I tentatively do accept the theory. And finally, I will illustrate the use of the theory as a critical tool in elucidating LDS scripture.

## WHAT IS AT STAKE?

There are a couple of religious issues that Latter-day Saints share with other Christians and Jews faced with the Documentary Hypothesis. The first has to do with prophetic authority. Although the Pentateuch itself does not claim Moses as its author, the tradition of Mosaic authorship is a venerable one indeed. If it should turn out that the great prophet Moses did not author the Pentateuch, on what basis should we accept it as scripture? Why is it more binding on us than any other pseudonymous writings from antiquity? Whence comes the religious authority of those books if they were written by nameless Jews?

It seems to me that Latter-day Saints, like Catholics and liberal Protestants, have a bit of an advantage in dealing with this issue as compared to conservative Protestants. While the Bible is important to us, we have other sources of religious authority as well. The authors of the Pentateuch may or may not have been prophets in their own right, but faithful Latter-day Saints have modern prophets leading and guiding the church today. Since these prophets accept the Pentateuch as scripture, we have a sort of modern "ratification" of the scriptural authority of the books attributed to Moses.<sup>61</sup> For religious traditions that accept no religious authority but the Bible itself, this is a more vexing question.<sup>62</sup>

A second issue is that of scriptural inerrancy. As I've pointed out, the Pentateuch itself does not claim Moses as its author, but Jesus and others often quoted from the Pentateuch and matter-of-factly ascribed authorship of that material to Moses. Therefore, scriptural inerrancy is fundamentally inconsistent with the hypothesis. During the 50 years that Catholics were bound to a doctrine of inerrancy by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893),<sup>63</sup> they were not able to accept the Documentary Hypothesis; shortly after that position was overturned by Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), many Catholic scholars began to incorporate the hypothesis into their teaching. Evangelicals who accept the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy would appear to be prohibited from accepting the hypothesis, as the Statement seems to allow no exception for statements in scripture regarding authorship.

Mormons have not traditionally insisted on inerrancy, so for them the Documentary Hypothesis is not *a priori* out of bounds. My experience teaching in the church suggests, however, that many individual Latter-day Saints do make inerrantist assumptions about the scriptures. So while

---

61. Cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 120.

62. Friedman speculates that D may have been written by Jeremiah or, possibly, Baruch, and that R was Ezra. See Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 242. This underscores the possibility that the authors of the sources may well have been prophets in their own right.

63. See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 107.

inerrancy may not be a formal hindrance to acceptance of the theory, for many it will be a practical one.<sup>64</sup> I personally do not think that Jesus was bound to alter the assumptions current in his day about Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, just as I do not think that he was bound to teach first century Judeans about quantum mechanics. I have taught many Old Testament lessons in the church, but I have never taught the Documentary Hypothesis in those settings, which is rather too academic for what those classes were trying to accomplish. Similarly, I believe Jesus was justified in teaching from within the culture of first-century Palestine.

Mormons have an additional layer of concerns, not shared by other Christians or Jews, relating to their own modern scripture: the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses/Joseph Smith Translation, and the Book of Abraham. In the case of the Book of Mormon, I see no necessary conflict between that book's essential historicity and the Documentary Hypothesis. The dating of the sources raises a potential conflict, if one accepts a late date for P<sup>65</sup> or the growing trend, described by Dozeman, of a late date for J.<sup>66</sup> But in the model of the theory I accept, the sources are all pre-Exilic,<sup>67</sup> and,

---

64. Stephen E. Robinson accepts a doctrine of inerrancy consistent with the Chicago Statement; see Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon & an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 33-76. As much as I enjoyed the book and appreciated Robinson's skills as an excellent spokesman for the Mormon side of the conversation, I disagree with him on this particular issue. Rather, I agree with the comments of Blake T. Ostler's review, "Bridging the Gulf," *FARMS Review of Books* 11, no. 2 (1999): 103-77.

65. Alan Goff, "A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Revisionism, Positivism, and the Bible and Book of Mormon," master's thesis, Brigham Young University (1989), 109-11, addresses a difficulty perceived by William Russell. Russell had wondered why the Pentateuch is not reflected much in the Book of Mormon (particularly the Pentateuch's dietary and ritual laws and the detailed legislation). Goff's proposed solution is to point to the traditional position that P was not known before the Exile. While I applaud Goff's instincts here, personally I believe that P predated D and, therefore, was a pre-Exilic text. I would follow Sorenson in seeing the relative lack of P influence in the Book of Mormon as a function of Lehi's roots being in the north. See the discussion in Daniel B. McKinlay's review of Goff's master's thesis, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1970): 86-95, on 94.

66. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 26, points out that the recent trend toward a later dating is, to an uncomfortable extent, based on an *argumentum e silentio*, the principle being that that which is not positively known to be early must be late. He also points out that these arguments put the critic under obligation to fill the vacuum left in the pre-Exilic period by the displacement of the early sources; that is, to provide an alternative account of the development of the tradition in either oral or written form, or both.

67. For the historical argument see Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 161-73, in a chapter entitled "A Brilliant Mistake." For linguistic evidence that the Hebrew of P predates Ezekiel, see the following: Avi Hurvitz, "The Evidence of Language in Dating the Priestly Code," *Revue Biblique* 81 (1974): 24-56, and *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Paris: Gabalda, 1982); Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical*

as I have indicated, I tend somewhat towards a certain agnosticism on the dating of the sources anyway.<sup>68</sup>

According to 1 Nephi 5:11, the brass plates contained the "five books of Moses." The reader will recall that Sjodahl rejected the Documentary Hypothesis outright based on that passage alone. But if the basic sources were all pre-Exilic, we do not know in what form those sources existed prior to the redaction of R. It may well be that there were "five books" of Moses, only in a somewhat different configuration than the five books we know today.<sup>69</sup> Although I admit this as a possibility, personally I think it is simpler to assume that the text referred to "books of Moses," taking the number "five" as a translator's gloss. 1 Nephi 19:23 refers to the "books of Moses" on the brass plates without the number "five," which supports this possibility. In fact, the first edition (1830) has "the Book of Moses," which suggests that even the plural "books" in 1 Nephi 5:11 may be a gloss based on the Prophet Joseph's assumptions and expectations.<sup>70</sup> 1 Nephi 22:20 and Helaman 8:13 refer simply and ambiguously to the "words" of Moses.

---

*Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Decatur, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1976), G. Rendsburg, "Late Biblical Hebrew and the Date of P," *Journal of the Ancient Near East Society* 12 (1980): 65-80, and Ziony Zevit, "Converging Lines of Evidence Bearing on the Date of P," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982): 502-509.

68. A more significant dating issue for the Book of Mormon relates to the proper dating of Second and Third Isaiah. A full discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this essay. Most Mormons have responded to the issue by insisting on the unity of Isaiah; for a brief survey of this position, see John W. Welch, "Authorship of the Book of Isaiah in Light of the Book of Mormon," in Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo: FARMS, 1998), 423-37. I will simply point out, as Nibley first observed (in *Since Cumorah*, 137-43), that the Book of Mormon text does not itself necessarily require such a conclusion. Indeed, in certain ways the Book of Mormon supports a multiple authorship view, particularly by beginning with Isaiah 2 rather than the later Isaiah 1, and by not quoting from Third Isaiah (with the possible exception of Jacob 6:14, which may allude to Isaiah 65:2; however, as David Wright himself observes, the allusion is only indirect, and seems to be directly based on Romans 10:20-21). This observation does not completely resolve the problem because the Book of Mormon still quotes from Second Isaiah, but it does provide a foundation for a scholarly resolution, as one could posit a Second Isaiah dating to the end of the 7th century or, possibly, the beginning of the 6th century B.C.E. See William Hamblin, "'Isaiah Update' Challenge," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no.1 (Spring 1984): 4-7. David Wright insists that Second Isaiah must date to no earlier than 540 B.C.E., thus, leaving a remaining gap of a minimum of about 60 years; see his "Does 'and upon all the ships of the sea' (2 Ne. 12:16 // Isa. 2:16) Reflect an Ancient Isaian Variant?" *Mormon Scripture Studies* <<http://mormonscripturestudies.com/>> at n34. While the issue has not yet been fully resolved, it seems to me that working with critical scholarship, as Nibley and Hamblin do, rather than butting heads against it, as most have tried, is the most promising avenue for an acceptable resolution.

69. For example, if J and E continued to exist in separate form along with the combination JE, the five "books" could have been J, E, JE, P, and D.

70. Kent Robson, without arguing for either, mentions both these possibilities in "The Bible, the Church, and its Scholars," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 85-90.

The Book of Mormon contains numerous references to “the law of Moses.” But that usage (*torath Mosheh*) was already attested in the scriptures to which Lehi would have had access.<sup>71</sup> Alma 13 also contains a version of the Ten Commandments that is close, but not identical, to Exodus 20. Scholars have theorized that there was an original text of the Commandments deriving from E that was elaborated on by P in Exodus 20 and by D in Deuteronomy 5. One who insists on “tight control” might say that Abinadi had access to a version of the Commandments that was influenced by P; one who allows for a “loose control” might say that Abinadi’s text derived from E (consistent with Sorenson’s theory), but that Joseph in general followed the form given in KJV Exodus 20, since it sufficed for his purpose here (*a la* B. H. Roberts’s explanation of Joseph’s use of the KJV in the Book of Mormon generally). It is most significant to me, however, that this lengthy text crosses no seams between sources.

I do not intend here to undertake a complete study of the use of the various documentary sources in the Book of Mormon. It will suffice for me to offer one example of how the Documentary Hypothesis can help to make sense of something we find in that book. In 1 Nephi 17:29, Nephi is lecturing his brothers on the importance of keeping the commandments of God:

Yea, and ye also know that Moses, by his word according to the power of God which was in him, smote the rock, and there came forth water, that the children of Israel might quench their thirst.

This incident is recounted in completely positive terms and is almost certainly based on the E text of Exodus 17:6. P in Num. 20:1-13 gives the incident at the waters of Meribah a different spin. In this “anti-Moses” text, Moses fails to follow the Lord’s instructions precisely (by striking the rock rather than speaking to it), and he and Aaron seem to take the glory of the miracle to themselves: “Hear now, ye rebels; must *we* fetch you water out of this rock?” (Num. 20:10, emphasis added). According to Num. 20:12, this incident became the reason the Lord refused to allow Moses to enter the promised land. Now, every Sunday school student is familiar with both the positive and negative accounts of Moses striking the rock; in fact, the 1981 LDS edition of the Book of Mormon cross-references both Exodus 17:6 and Num. 20:11. Yet Nephi and the Book of Mormon betray no knowledge whatsoever of the negative P tradition. I find this to be remarkable, and I take it as an indication that there may well be something to the Documentary Hypothesis.<sup>72</sup>

---

71. As in Joshua 8:31-32, 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6, 23:25; 2 Chronicles 23:18, 25:4, and 30:16.

72. I think it would be worthwhile for someone to study all of the references and allusions to, and quotations of, the Pentateuch in the Book of Mormon, with a view to

The Book of Moses is, of course, derived from the JST. Although the former is canonical and the latter is not, I think about them in essentially the same way. My experience teaching in the church suggests that the vast majority of Saints simply assumes that the JST is nothing more nor less than a textual restoration. Such a view is, of course, inconsistent with the Documentary Hypothesis.

My own approach to the Joseph Smith Translation is eclectic; I think there are different things going on in different passages. I find what I call the "Matthews paradigm" to be a useful way of thinking about those different things:

1. Portions may amount to restorations of content material once written by the biblical authors but since deleted from the Bible.
2. Portions may consist of a record of actual historical events that were not recorded, or were recorded but never included in the biblical collection.
3. Portions may consist of inspired commentary by the Prophet Joseph Smith, enlarged, elaborated, and even adapted to a latter-day situation. This may be similar to what Nephi meant by "likening" the scriptures to himself and his people in their particular circumstance. (See 1 Nephi 19:23-24; 2 Nephi 11:8.)
4. Some items may be a harmonization of doctrinal concepts that were revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith independently of his translation of the Bible, but by means of which he was able to discover that a biblical passage was inaccurate.<sup>73</sup>

Personally, I would turn this paradigm somewhat on its head and weight

---

determining which sources appear to be used and whether any obvious seams are crossed. I am not aware of any major seam being crossed in the Book of Mormon, but I have not undertaken a detailed study of the matter. My brief survey above is consistent with Sorenson's thesis that the brass plates contained E, but I suspect that other sources may be represented. For instance, Mosiah 13:5, which reports that Abinadi's face shone with exceeding luster as Moses' did, seems to be dependent on a P text (Exodus 34:29-35). But, as with the Ten Commandments, it is difficult to know whether there may have been an E text underlying the P account in Exodus 34. Given the brevity of the Book of Mormon allusion and its pro-Moses nature, this is certainly a possibility.

73. Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo: BYU Press, 1985), 253. An obvious addition to this list would be alternate English translations that involve no difference in the original language text. Another eclectic approach is provided by Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 51-61, who suggests that the JST emendations fall into six categories: (1) long, revealed additions with little or no biblical parallel, such as the visions of Moses and Enoch; (2) "commonsense" changes; (3) interpretive additions (often signaled by the phrase "or in other words"); (4) harmonizations; (5) diverse changes that resist categorization; and (6) grammatical improvements, technical clarifications, and modernization of terms.

inspired commentaries as substantially more numerous than textual restorations.<sup>74</sup> I also very much like Anthony Hutchinson's insight comparing such commentary to the *midrashim* and *targumin* (to which I would add the genres of "rewritten Bible" and *pesharim* attested among the Dead Sea Scrolls).<sup>75</sup> I will suggest further below how an eclectic reading of the JST cannot only accommodate the Documentary Hypothesis, but in a way, in fact, supports it.

As Hutchinson points out, Abraham 4-5 crosses the P-J seam at Genesis 2:4, which raises a potential issue with respect to the Documentary Hypothesis. Personally, I am open to three theories regarding the origins of the Book of Abraham: (1) the Book of Abraham is a late copy of a text actually going back to Abraham, the papyrus source of which was not part of the

---

74. Where I believe Matthews would assume that a JST change is a textual restoration unless there is a compelling reason not to, I would assume that a JST change is not a textual restoration unless there is some sort of evidence to support that conclusion. Although extant textual evidence would be best, I realize that a great deal of such evidence has been lost. I would be satisfied if we could at least demonstrate some sort of rationale why a scribe or redactor, either intentionally or accidentally, would have altered the text. For instance, there was a demonstrable trend away from viewing God in anthropomorphic terms, so if a JST change were to restore an anthropomorphic understanding of God, that change would at least have a chance of being in effect a textual restoration. In my judgment, in the majority of cases it is difficult to see why a scribe would have corrupted the text in the direction posited by the JST; therefore, it seems more likely to me that such passages are something other than a textual restoration.

75. I believe the common assumption among the general membership that the JST is nothing but a pure textual restoration is untenable. I wrote an article using a particular type of textual evidence to support the view, held by Hugh Nibley, Richard Lloyd Anderson, John Tvedtnes, and many of my BYU professors (outside the Religion Department), that a more nuanced and eclectic approach to the JST is necessary. See Kevin L. Barney, "The Joseph Smith Translation and Ancient Texts of the Bible," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 85-102. While my article takes the Matthews paradigm seriously (I give suggested examples of textual restorations and historical corrections in addition to inspired commentary; although I did not address this in the article, I also believe it is somewhat ironic, given the title "Joseph Smith Translation," that Saints rarely consider the possibility that some changes may actually represent alternate translations without positing any change in the ancient text), some of Matthews's colleagues in the Religion Department of BYU seem not to take it seriously. For instance, the assumption of nothing but pure textual restoration is absolutely pervasive in the essays of Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet, eds., *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1985), and Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews, *Plain and Precious Things Restored: The Doctrinal and Historical Significance of the Joseph Smith Translation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995). There is a tendency for these authors to take a very fundamentalist view of the JST as a pure textual restoration, and to invoke the Matthews paradigm only *in extremis* (if at all; to my knowledge, it is not referred to even once in these two books). I believe that we need to teach our people a more informed, defensible, and possibly more fruitful approach to the JST, and although I personally weight Matthews's categories somewhat differently than he does, I would be thrilled to see the Matthews paradigm taught to the general membership of the church.

J. S. Papyri recovered from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; (2) the Book of Abraham is an inspired translation of a Hellenistic-era pseudepigraphon; or (3) Karl C. Sandberg's pure revelation theory reflected in his essay "Knowing Brother Joseph Again: The Book of Abraham, and Joseph Smith as Translator,"<sup>76</sup> in which he equates "translation" as practiced by Joseph Smith with seership. The second and third theories would not conflict with the Documentary Hypothesis, but the first would *if* those two chapters were taken as a literal translation of material deriving from Abraham. I do not profess to know precisely what is going on in Abraham 4-5, so I tend to approach that material as reflecting a "loose control." I view Abraham 4-5 as relating in some way to the KJV of Genesis 1-2 with corrections largely deriving from Joseph Smith's academic study of Hebrew in the Kirtland School of the Prophets.<sup>77</sup> In fact, many of the variations in those chapters of Abraham from the KJV of Genesis do not presuppose a different underlying text; rather, they appear to be alternative (and generally superior) *translations* of the same text underlying the KJV. Therefore, I would tend to apply (by analogy to the Book of Mormon) either the Roberts view (i.e., that the Abrahamic text contained a revelation concerning the creation, but Joseph Smith worked from the KJV as being sufficiently close for this purpose) or the Ostler view (i.e., that the material paralleling Genesis 1-2 in Abraham 4-5 is an "expansion" on the basic Abrahamic text).

#### SOME MISGIVINGS

I have several misgivings about the Documentary Hypothesis. The first has to do with some of the intellectual traditions that contributed to its development. For instance, as Dozeman mentions (90), anti-Catholic polemic at one time played a role in the formation of the theory, as also did anti-Semitic polemic. In the early part of this century, it was not unusual for Jewish leaders to call higher criticism the "higher anti-Semitism."<sup>78</sup> These polemical attitudes tended to lead some to argue for a late date for the P material. The contribution of these strains of thought to the theory concerns me. Mormons, with their ordained priesthood, are closer to Catholics on "priestly" issues than are conservative Protestants, and the general phil-Semitism (attraction to things Semitic) of Mormonism is well known. Therefore, that which is anti-Catholic or anti-Semitic can easily become anti-Mormon in a hurry. Of course, many Catholic and Jewish scholars adopt the theory today, and I have no reason to suspect that polemics continue to

76. In *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 17-37.

77. See Kevin L. Barney, "Joseph Smith's Emendation of Hebrew Genesis 1:1," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 103-35.

78. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 121.79; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 28.

play a role in the current articulation of the theory. I do wonder, though, whether the theory might have taken an unfortunate and misguided turn at some point in the past due to the hatreds of some of its proponents.

Another factor that tended to support a late date for P was Hegelian philosophy. Some of the theory's architects made terribly simplistic assumptions about the straight-line evolution of societies from simple tribes to more complex forms (often characterized as developing in three successive, artificial stages). Thus the complicated legal requirements of the temple cultus reflected in P had to come at the end of this evolutionary development. For my part, I reject any such assumption.

As the theory was presented at the beginning of the century, it showed the strong influence of Enlightenment rationalism. It was often presented as a challenge to religion. Today, I think that there are many religiously faithful scholars who have come to terms with the theory. Dozeman, for instance, to his credit, presents the case for the theory in "bloodless" terms. The issue for him is not between reason and religion; rather, the question is simply whether Moses composed the Pentateuch in the form in which we have it today. I can only accept the theory on such a narrow, bloodless basis. If the question were between the Documentary Hypothesis and one's religion, I suspect most people would choose their religion. As I have suggested, however, I do not believe the choice is necessarily that stark.

I also worry about the imposition of the theory among young scholars as a matter of academic politics. Speaking of the end of the last century, the late R. K. Harrison remarked:

A close if unofficial surveillance was imposed upon potential candidates for positions in the Old Testament field in British universities, and only those who displayed proper respect for the canons of critical orthodoxy were appointed to academic posts.<sup>79</sup>

This type of surveillance, of course, continued into the 20th century and continues yet today. Therefore, more conservative positions tend to be severely handicapped in the academic marketplace.

B. H. Roberts was often astonished "to see what heavy weights are hung [by critical scholars] upon very slender threads."<sup>80</sup> I can sympathize with that sentiment. I do not have anywhere near the confidence in the detailed results of source criticism that many biblical scholars seem to have. This point can be illustrated by an experiment conducted by three bright students of the ancient Near East and their obliging professor, a first-rate biblical scholar.<sup>81</sup> The students composed three page-length stories in a bib-

---

79. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 28.

80. As quoted in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 115.

81. The experiment is recounted in Daniel C. Peterson, with John Gee, "Editor's Intro-

lical parody style. After one student composed a text, another would “redact” it by adding and deleting material; the professor then analyzed the resultant text the same way he would analyze the Bible itself. The professor did pretty well in his analysis of one of the three texts, but he was completely off on the other two. Of course, in true source criticism we have no way to check whether our conclusions are correct; in this experiment, where the results could be checked, the good professor only managed about a 33% success rate. That is a troubling and cautionary tale.

Further, it should not be assumed that all serious students of the Bible necessarily accept the Documentary Hypothesis. Out of curiosity, I took a poll on the Biblical Hebrew Listserv concerning list members’ attitudes towards the Documentary Hypothesis, receiving 10 responses. Although this was not a scientifically constructed poll and the response rate was low,<sup>82</sup> it does illustrate that in a group of knowledgeable biblical scholars (including academics, graduate students, ministers, and Israelis, few of whom are LDS), it is not difficult to find those who reject the theory. Below I set forth the text of my initial post, with a very brief summary of the responses I received following each question in italic type and brackets:

I have been reviewing scholarship on the Documentary Hypothesis. Given the number of Hebrew scholars here with strong views on such matters, I would like to take an informal survey of the members of this list regarding their views of the Documentary Hypothesis:

1. In general, do you accept the hypothesis? [*Of the 10 respondents, 3 (30%) accept the hypothesis; 7 (70%) reject it.*]

2. If you answered “yes” to question 1, in what ways do your views differ from the classical Graf-Wellhausen formulation of the hypothesis? (*E.g., do you accept or reject a separate E source? Would you date P prior to D, as some do? Do you agree with the recent trend of dating J late rather than early?*) [*Of those who accepted the hypothesis, there was a fair amount of uncertainty whether various materials constituted sources, books, or schools. These respondents generally did not think we can limit the number of sources to 4, and were uncertain as to whether JE originated as separate sources. One of these respondents mentioned that he would date P prior to D.*]

3. If you reject the hypothesis from within the historical/literary critical school, with what would you replace it? A “fragmentary” view that sees numerous fragments being redacted together rather than three or four main documents? A “supplemental” view that sees one main source that

---

duction: Through a Glass, Darkly,” *FARMS Review of Books* 9, no. 2 (1997) in a section captioned “Creative Misreading,” ix-xxiii.

82. The list has about 650 members, but the vast majority of those are lurkers, with only a couple of dozen contributing on a regular basis.

was supplemented with other material? Other? [*The only respondent to reject the hypothesis from within the literary-critical school, a minister, opted for a late, fragmentary theory.*]

4. If you reject the historical/literary critical enterprise altogether, what is your view of the composition and authorship of the Pentateuch? Is it a unified composition? What factors are most important in your rejection of the Documentary Hypothesis? [*6 of the 10 respondents (60%) see the Pentateuch as largely a unified composition written by Moses, with some updating by copyists. One, who holds a Ph.D. with an emphasis in biblical studies from Berkeley, complained about contradictory approaches among scholars, citing a study of nine different source critics of the Joseph narratives, not one of which agreed with the others in how he divided the section (acknowledging, however, this to be an easy target since J and E are difficult to separate in that section). Another respondent cited his own case study of the three wife-sister stories as showing that the glaring "contradictions" among them that are supposed to demonstrate separate sources are actually a deliberate literary device designed to teach theological truth.<sup>83</sup> An Israeli stated that he did not accept the hypothesis because of "the dishonest and anti-Semitic motivations of its proponents," echoing the old "higher anti-Semitism" comment. A couple of respondents stated in effect that, although this is not their area of expertise, they see the theory as failed. Although they have nothing with which to replace it, they state that this is no reason to cling to a failed theory. These respondents largely fall back on the older, conservative view and concentrate on linguistic matters.*]

Thanks in advance for your insights.

#### SOME CAUTIONS

Although I do accept the Documentary Hypothesis, my acceptance is a cautious one and is subject to change. I describe here some of the reasons for that caution:

*Archaeology.* The Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis was worked out in the abstract in the German schools based primarily on the characteristics of the texts themselves. The great advance of Mesopotamian and Egyptian archaeology was still in its infancy at that time. Archaeology provides a "real world" control on the antiseptic researches of the literary critic in the library. In particular, the argument for late dating based on ritual complexity appears to be misplaced, given the already advanced state of civilization in other ancient Near Eastern cultures.

S. R. Driver succeeded to the Regius Professorship of Hebrew at Oxford on the death of E. B. Pusey in 1882. Driver overtook A. H. Sayce for

---

83. See John Ronning, "The Naming of Isaac: The Role of the Wife-Sister Episodes in the Redaction of Genesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* (Spring 1991): 1-27.

the position, who was turned down on the ground that he was a leading exponent of German criticism and, therefore, was an "unsafe candidate" for the chair (at a time when academic prejudice still cut against higher criticism rather than for it). Ironically, Driver went on to become one of the most important advocates for higher criticism in the English language. Meanwhile, Sayce turned his attention to archaeology and soon became one of the more vocal critics of the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis, publishing books with titles like *The "Higher Criticism" and the Verdict of the Monuments* (1894), *Early Israel and the Surrounding Nations* (1899), and *Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies* (1904).<sup>84</sup>

Half a century later, another prominent scholar who accepted the Documentary Hypothesis, Cyrus Gordon, also changed his mind based on archaeological factors. Gordon authored a series of standard lexical manuals on Ugaritic, and it was the Ras Shamra tablets themselves, along with material on Sumero-Akkadian tablets, that caused him to alter his opinion.<sup>85</sup> While exposure to archaeology has not caused most scholars to follow Gordon in rejecting the hypothesis entirely, in the latter half of the 20th century it has had a moderating influence on some of the prior excesses of the theory.<sup>86</sup>

*Oral Tradition.* Part of the problem with postulating three or four "sources" is in defining precisely what that means. Almost certainly these sources were not whole-cloth compositions, but relied in turn on earlier written sources. In addition to prior documentary sources, such as the Covenant Code (Ex. 20:22-23:33) and the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), there is also the matter of oral tradition to consider. Hermann Gunkel and his followers developed form criticism and sought to trace the religious ideas of the Hebrews back to their original oral forms. Later, the Uppsala School of Sweden also emphasized the oral transmission of the sagas of early Israel. In my view Uppsala School scholars go too far, preferring oral transmission almost to the exclusion of writing into a very late period. But for me the critical point is that wherever the written document stops, we still must go back further, even over a period of centuries, to trace the oral antecedents to the written documentary source (at least in the cases of J and E).

*The Homeric Parallel.* In 1940 Umberto Cassuto gave a series of eight lectures in Jerusalem on the Documentary Hypothesis.<sup>87</sup> In his first lecture

---

84. See Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 28-30.

85. See Cyrus H. Gordon, "Higher Critics and Forbidden Fruit," *Christianity Today* 4, no. 4 (1959): 131-34. See also the footnote to the description of Hugh Nibley's views above (n40).

86. See, for example, William F. Albright, "Toward a More Conservative View," *Christianity Today* 7, no. 8 (1963): 359-61.

87. Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983).

he described the remarkable parallelism between Homeric and biblical studies. The role played by Astruc on the biblical side (described in some detail by Dozeman) was played on the Homeric side by another French dilettante, Abbe d'Aubignac. His book, *Conjectures<sup>88</sup> academiques ou dissertations sur l'Iliade*, published posthumously in 1715, expressed the view that Homer's poems were not unitary compositions, but rather collections of poems that were originally wholly unrelated. In each case, the French amateur was followed by a German professional scholar who transformed the Frenchman's opinions into a systematized theory.<sup>89</sup> The development of a fragmentary theory on the biblical side even more closely paralleled the Homeric theory, and both fields saw the development of a supplementary hypothesis in the 1830s. The pinnacle of 19th century multiple-source scholarship was reached on the biblical side by Wellhausen and on the Homeric side by Wilamowitz, men who were colleagues and friends.

The 1930s saw the beginnings of a paradigm shift in Homeric studies away from the older fragmentary approach to one of unity. The stage seemed to be set for a similar movement on the biblical side as well; the discovery of the Ras Shamra tablets in 1929 provided the ammunition, and scholars such as Cassuto and, later, Gordon pounded away against the Documentary Hypothesis. Unquestionably the 1930s were the low point for that theory during the 20th century. Nevertheless, Cassuto and others were ultimately unable to effect a comparable paradigm shift on the biblical side. There has been no widespread return to a unitary theory of the Pentateuch in biblical studies, thus, breaking the long pattern of parallelism with the classicists.

The long, parallel development between the two fields seems to have resulted in part from reciprocal influences and in part from the general ebb and flow of academic fashion. Inasmuch as there is no necessary reason that the fields should have matched each other in historical development, one is left to wonder just how "objective" the scholars have been in their studies. The breach of that parallelism in the 1930s may, of course, simply reflect differences in the origins of Homeric epic and the Pentateuch, but I cannot help wondering whether the classicists got something right where the biblicists failed to follow. I am ultimately uncertain what to make of this parallel, but its mere existence I find rather troubling, and the divergent paths established in the 1930s I find rather intriguing.

*Literary Structures.* One of the more sophisticated critiques of the Docu-

---

88. Cassuto points out that Astruc's work was also called *Conjectures*, his title being *Conjectures sur les memoires originaux dont il parait que Moyse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Genese*.

89. Represented on the biblical side by Eichhorn's *Einleitung ins Alte Testament* (1780-83), and on the Homeric side by Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795).

mentary Hypothesis to appear in recent years is Kikawada and Quinn's *Before Abraham Was*. Focusing on Genesis 1-11, they acknowledge the apparent diversity of the material, which is what drives the Documentary Hypothesis, but they then argue that that diversity, in fact, reflects a complicated literary unity. Part of their argument depends upon a five-part repetitive structure that, at least on first reading, struck me as rather artificial. I was more impressed by the portion of the argument based on chiasmus. For instance, Genesis 6:8-9 forms a chiasm that seems to incorporate a J-P seam (the text attributed to P is italicized):

Noah  
 found favor  
 in the eyes of the LORD  
*These are the generations of Noah*  
*Noah was a righteous man*  
*perfect he was*  
 in his generations  
 with God  
 walked  
 Noah<sup>90</sup>

Other examples are offered as well.

Many Latter-day Saints are, of course, familiar with chiasmus from the work of John Welch, who, as a missionary in Germany, discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.<sup>91</sup> Welch's *Chiasmus in Antiquity* includes an article by Yehuda Radday,<sup>92</sup> who has been active in using chiasmus in arguments against the Documentary Hypothesis.<sup>93</sup> At present these arguments do not yet, in my judgment, amount to a comprehensive alternative explanation, but they do strike me as having potential if further developed and elaborated in concert with other gross literary structures.<sup>94</sup>

90. This is the example cited by Kevin Christensen as mentioned previously.

91. See, for example, John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69-84. I recently substitute-taught a Gospel Doctrine lesson that included Alma 36. I asked the class who among them had heard of chiasmus; about half raised their hands, which I consider a sizeable percentage.

92. Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Provo: Research Press, 1999), 50-117 (first published by Gerstenberg Verlag, Hildesheim, in 1981).

93. E.g., Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasm in Tora," *Linguistica Biblica* 19 (1972): 12-23.

94. Repetition was the hallmark of Hebrew literary style. As we shall see, part of the argument for the hypothesis involves numerous contradictions in the Pentateuch. But one is left to wonder why, if such numerous and blatant contradictions did not seem to bother R, we can be certain that an original author would have been bothered by them? See Kikawada and Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*, 59.

Part of the argument for the Documentary Hypothesis concerns different terminology used in different sections of text. The most famous example involves the names of deity (Yahweh v. El or Elohim), but there are others, such as the name of Moses' father-in-law (Jethro v. Reuel) or the mountain of God (Sinai v. Horeb). The common conservative explanation for the use of different names for God highlights the different semantic ranges of the names, suggesting that the names are used appropriately and consistently in their given contexts.<sup>95</sup> There is another possibility, however. In the Ras Shamra tablets, each deity generally has two names (or a name and a title), which are often used as formulaic word pairs in the repetitive, parallelistic structure of the Ugaritic epics.<sup>96</sup> Just as in the *Iliad* it is useful for metrical reasons for Homer to be able to refer either to Alexandros or Paris in a given part of the line, and just as the Hebrew Bible often uses synonymous names such as Jacob and Israel in various parallel structures,<sup>97</sup> so it seems possible to me that there may be a literary explanation for the variant use of names in the Pentateuch. I raise this simply as a possibility to be explored; I have not yet seen an attempt to apply this idea systematically to the variant proper names in the putative sources.<sup>98</sup>

*Statistical Linguistics.* In 1985 the results of the Genesis Project were published in English.<sup>99</sup> This project involved a combination of biblical studies, linguistics, statistics, and computer science in an analysis of the authorship of the book of Genesis, concluding that the book was a unified composition. As with chiasmus, informed Latter-day Saints are familiar with statistical linguistic studies due to their application to the Book of Mormon. I happened to be present at the BYU forum assembly where the initial results of Wayne A. Larsen's, Alvin C. Rencher's, and Tim Layton's study of computerized stylometry, or "wordprinting," of the Book of Mormon were presented, finding that the Book of Mormon was written by multiple authors as opposed to a single author.<sup>100</sup> That early work has been elaborated on by the late John L. Hilton, who went to great pains to immunize the methodology from criticism.<sup>101</sup> Wordprinting involves the measurement of

---

95. E.g., Cassuto, *Documentary Hypothesis*, 15-26.

96. See Kevin L. Barney, "Poetic Diction and Parallel Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 15-81.

97. J. Dahse, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 6 (1903): 305, as cited in Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 30, demonstrates that it is impossible to use the names of Jacob and Israel as indications of different literary sources.

98. The basic observation is made, however, in Kikawada and Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*, 91-92.

99. Yehuda T. Radday and Haim Shore, et al., *Genesis: An Authorship Study in Computer-Assisted Statistical Linguistics* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1985).

100. See Larsen, Rencher, and Layton, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," *BYU Studies* 20 (Spring 1980): 225-51.

101. For a summary, see John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of

non-contextual word rate usages of different authors and noting their statistical differences. The great hope and promise of wordprinting lies in the possibility of bringing a certain scientific "objectivity" to author identification and differentiation, a judgment that is otherwise profoundly subjective.

I remember being impressed by all of the charts and graphs used in that forum assembly. I am similarly impressed by those used since by Hilton, as well as those used in the Genesis Project. But while the charts look impressive, I have always felt that the basic assumptions underlying Book of Mormon wordprint studies are faulty. I concur in the assessment of John Tvedtnes, who points out that (1) an English translation should reflect the language of the translator more than that of the original author, and (2) the particles used in wordprint studies (such as "of") are often non-existent in Hebrew, which tends to use syntax to express the meaning of English particles.<sup>102</sup> An additional concern I have is with the naive assumption that speeches were perfectly transcribed. The reality, as seen in the work of such ancient historians as Herodotus and Josephus, is that such speeches were often composed by the historian himself as approximations of what the historical character would have said under the circumstances. Generally, historical speeches were not attended by court reporters making transcriptions of precisely what was said on the occasion.

Part of the problem with computerized stylometry is that the hoped for "objectivity" does not seem to have been achieved yet and may be unachievable. Yehuda Radday rejects the Documentary Hypothesis and so his team finds unity while other scholars who accept the hypothesis utilize statistical linguistics to find the very diversity they had expected to find all along.<sup>103</sup> It appears to me that there is still (unwitting) manipulation of the data going into the black box of the statistical construct (or unwitting manipulation of the statistical construct itself) so that the hoped for result indeed emerges from the other side. I frankly do not understand the statistics well enough to offer a useful critique of such studies. All I can do is report that I remain open minded about their possibilities, but I have not yet been convinced of their validity. As this fledgling bit of science develops, however, it does have the potential for making a legitimate contribution to the

---

Mormon Authorship," in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo: FARMS, 1997), 225-53.

102. John A. Tvedtnes in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 33 [here critiquing Edward H. Ashment, "A Record in the Language of My Father": Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon," in Brent Lee Metcalfe, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 329-93, but agreeing with Ashment on this point].

103. See the excellent comments of Shemaryahu Talmon, "A Bible Scholar's Evaluation," in *Genesis: An Authorship Study*, 225-35.

problem of the authorship of the Pentateuch. My own stance with regard to wordprinting is one of "watchful waiting."<sup>104</sup>

*Canonical Criticism.* In some quarters patience with the excavative techniques of the literary critics has worn thin. Some scholars, therefore, simply bracket the issue of historical origins and study the biblical text as it exists in its final form, sometimes taking a rather agnostic view of what can be known concerning the historical origins of the text. Illustrations of such an approach would include the work of Brevard Childs, Northrop Frye, and Robert Alter. I often do something similar. In my personal study and in preparing to teach in church classrooms, I often just take the Pentateuch as it comes. Nevertheless, I do think it is helpful to be aware of the Documentary Hypothesis and the issues surrounding it and, in appropriate circumstances, to engage it. My personal ideal in relation to the Documentary Hypothesis is to be "conservative but critically informed."<sup>105</sup>

#### WHY I ACCEPT THE HYPOTHESIS

Given the misgivings and cautions described above, one might marvel that I would still accept the Documentary Hypothesis at all. But I do, if only tentatively. Ironically, perhaps, it was my belief in the Book of Mormon that prepared me to be able to accept the hypothesis. The Book of Mormon explicitly reflects a very similar process—the redaction by Mormon and his son Moroni of multiple documentary sources (including the large plates of Nephi, the small plates of Nephi [incorporated *in toto*], the record of Zeniff, the record of Alma, letters, and the Jaredite record on the 24 gold plates).<sup>106</sup>

The best concise recitation of evidence for the hypothesis I have seen is Richard Friedman's article "Torah (Pentateuch)" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*;<sup>107</sup> my brief synopsis below is based on this source. The case for the Documentary Hypothesis rests on the convergence of several large bodies of data:

*Doublets.* A "doublet" is a single story that exists in two variant forms; sometimes three forms of the story are attested, which are then called "triplets." Doublets can occur in single-author works, but the sheer number of them in the Pentateuch seems to indicate a more complex history of com-

104. For a useful survey of such studies articulating common weaknesses, see A. Dean Forbes, "Statistical Research on the Bible," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:185-206.

105. I have adopted here David Noel Freedman's description of his teacher, William Foxwell Albright. See Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 60.

106. Cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 110.

107. In 6:605-22. This article provides much greater detail than the brief summary provided here.

position.<sup>108</sup> I reread the Pentateuch a few months ago for an Old Testament class I was teaching, and I found the number of doublets I noticed on my own in the text to be striking. Doublets include:

1. The creation (Gen. 1:1-2:3 and 2:4b-25)
2. Genealogy from Adam (Gen. 4:17-26 vs. 5:1-28, 30-32)
3. The flood (Gen. 6:5-8; 7: 1-5, 7, 10, 12, 16b-20, 22-23; 8:2b-3a, 6, 8-12, 13b, 20-22 and 6: 9-22; 7:8-9, 11, 13-16a, 21, 24; 8 1-2a, 3b-5, 7, 13a, 14-19; 9:1-17)
4. Genealogy from Shem (Gen. 10:21-31 and 11:10-26)
5. Abraham's migration. (Gen. 12:1-4a and 12:4b-5)
6. Wife/sister accounts: a triplet (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18, and 26: 6-14)
7. Abraham and Lot part company (Gen. 13:5, 7-11a, 12b-14, and 13:6, 11b-12a)
8. The Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15 and 17)
9. Hagar and Ishmael: a triplet (Gen. 16:1-2, 4-14; 16:3, 15-16 and 21: 8-19)
10. Prophecy of the birth of Isaac (Gen. 17:16-19 and 18:10-14)
11. Naming of Beer Sheba (Gen. 21:22-31 and 26:15-33)
12. Jacob, Esau, and the departure to the east (Gen. 27:1-45; 28:10, and 26:34-35; 27:46; 28:1-9)
13. Jacob at Beth-El: a triplet (Gen. 28:10, 11a, 13-16, 19, and 28:11b-12, 17-18, 20-22, and 35:9-15)
14. Jacob's name changed to Israel (Gen. 32:25-33 and 35: 9-10)
15. Joseph sold into Egypt (Gen. 37:2b, 3b, 5-11, 19-20, 23, 25b-27, 28b, 31-35; 39:1, and 37:3a, 4, 12-18, 21-22, 24, 25a, 28a, 29-30)
16. Yahweh summons Moses: a triplet (Ex. 3:2-4a, 5, 7-8, and 3:1, 4b, 6, 9-15, and 6:2-12)
17. Moses and Pharaoh (Ex. 5:1-6:1; 7:14-18, 20b-21a, 23-29; 8:3b-11a, 16-28; 9:1-7, 13-34; 10:1-19, 21-26, 28-29; 11:1-9 and 7:10-13, 19-20a, 22b; 8:1-3a, 12-25; 9:8-12)
18. The Red Sea (Ex. 13:21-22; 14:5a, 6, 9a, 10b, 13-14, 19b, 20b, 21b, 24, 27b, 30-31 and 14:1-4, 8, 9b, 10a, 10c, 15-18, 21a, 21c, 22-23, 26-27a, 28-29)
19. Manna and quail in the wilderness (Ex. 16:2-3, 6-35a, and Num. 11:4-34)
20. Water from a rock at Meribah (Ex. 17:2-7 and Num. 20:2-13)

---

108. The Book of Mormon also includes doublets and triplets. Critics usually argue that these are indications of a single author. We should consider the possibility, however, that, as in the case of the Pentateuch, they are actually an indication of multiple author composition.

21. Theophany at Sinai/Horeb: a triplet (Ex. 19:1-2a; 24:15b-18a, and 19:26-29, 16b-17, 19; 20:18-21, and 19:10-16a, 18, 20-25)
22. The Decalog: a triplet (Ex. 20:1-17, 34:10-28, and Deut. 5:6-18)
23. The spies (Num. 13:1-16, 21, 25-26, 32; 14:1a, 2-3, 5-10, 26-29, and 13:17-20, 22-24, 27-31, 33; 14:1b, 4, 11-25, 39-45)
24. Heresy at Peor (Num. 25:1-25 and 25:6-19)
25. Appointment of Joshua (Num. 27:12-23 and Deut. 31:14-15, 23)
26. Centralization of sacrifice (Lev. 17 and Deut. 12)
27. Forbidden animals (Lev. 11 and Deut. 14)

*Terminology.* Different passages use different vocabulary, including names for the deity and other proper names, as we have mentioned. What makes this significant is that *these differences of terminology fall consistently into one or another group of the doublets*. That is, one version of a story uses one set of names and terms, and the other uses another. Below are a few examples:

1. The names of the deity. Friedman points out that, though periodically challenged in scholarship, this variation remains a strong indication of authorship. J excludes the word "God" in narration, with perhaps one or two exceptions out of all the occurrences in the Pentateuch; P maintains its distinction of the divine names with one possible exception in hundreds of occurrences; E maintains the distinction with two possible exceptions.
2. Sinai (J and P) v. Horeb (E and D), as mentioned above.
3. The expression "the place where Yahweh sets his name" and its variants occur in D and E, but never in J or P.
4. *gw'* ["to die"]—11 occurrences in the Torah, all in P.
5. *ngp* ["plague"]—15 occurrences in the Torah, 14 of them in P.
6. *'eda* ["congregation"]—over 100 occurrences, all in P.
7. *nasi'* ["tribal leader"]—one occurrence in J, one in E, but 67 in P.

Friedman gives an additional 17 examples, which themselves comprise just the tip of the iceberg; scholars have assembled extensive lists of the language characteristics of the sources.

*Contradictions.* There are numerous contradictions in the text of the Torah, *which fall along the same lines as the doublets and terminology*. They include the following:

1. The order of creation in P (Gen. 1:1-2:3) is plants, animals, man, woman, but in J (Gen. 2:4b-25) is man, plants, animals, woman.
2. Seven pair of clean and one of unclean animals for J (Gen. 7:2, 3) vs. only one pair of each animal taken into the ark for P (Gen. 6: 19; 7:8, 9, 15).

3. The deity limits the life span of humans to 120 years in Gen. 6:3 (J), but many persons are reported thereafter to have lived longer than this—as in Gen. 9:29; 11:10-23, 32 (P).
4. Abraham moves from Ur to Haran and from Haran to Canaan (P). When Abraham is already in *Haran*, the deity tells him in Gen. 12:1 to “Leave your land and your birthplace” (i.e., *Ur*). Also, Abraham later sends his servant “to my land and my birthplace” to get Isaac a wife (Gen. 24:4), and the servant goes to *Haran*.
5. Bethlehem in Gen. 35:16-19 (E) vs. Paddan Aram in Gen. 35:23-26 (P) as Benjamin’s birthplace.
6. In the E portion of Gen. 37, Reuben persuades his brothers not to kill Joseph; he plans to save him, but Midianites take him and sell him into slavery in Egypt. In the J portion, Judah persuades his brothers not to kill Joseph, and they sell him to Ishmaelites.
7. Jethro in Ex. 3:1, 18; 18:1-27 (E) vs. Reuel in Ex. 2:16-18; Num. 10:29 (J) as Moses’ father-in-law (this could have been categorized as variant terminology).
8. In Ex. 6:3 (P), Yahweh tells Moses that his divine name was unknown to the patriarchs, but in the J texts of Genesis (such as Gen. 18:14; 24:3; 26:22; 27:20, 27; 28:16) the patriarchs do know his name.
9. Moses moves the Tent of Meeting outside the camp in Ex. 33:7-11 (E), but the Tent is not built until Ex. 36 (P). The tabernacle is erected inside the camp in Num. 2 (P), but is still outside the camp in Num. 12:4-15 (E).
10. When Moses quotes the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy (D), there are numerous small differences in wording from the text in Ex. 20 (P), most strikingly the different reason given for the sabbath commandment in Ex. 20:11 (P) and Deut. 5:15 (D). Ex. 34:14-26 (J) has seven of the ten commandments completely different, and the wording still varies on the three comparable commandments.
11. In Num. 11 (E) the people are tired of eating only manna, and so they are fed birds, but in Ex. 16 (P) it is reported that they had been getting birds along with the manna from the beginning.
12. Caleb alone stands against the spies who give a discouraging report in Num. 13:30, 14:24 (J), but in Num. 14:6-9, 38 (P) it is both Caleb and Joshua.
13. The Amalekites reside with the Canaanites in the land in Num. 14:25, 45 (J), but they reside in the wilderness in Ex. 17:8-16.
14. Korah’s congregation is swallowed by the earth, which closes over them, along with Dathan and Abiram in Num. 16:31-33 (J), but they are consumed by fire two verses later in 16:35 (P).
15. Moabite women seduce the Israelites in Num. 25:1 (J), but they are Midianite women in 25:6, 31:1-16 (P).

*Other.* We could go on at length setting forth the argument. Friedman gives an extensive list of consistent characteristics in each group of texts (for instance, there are no angels, no talking animals, no dreams, and no blatant anthropomorphisms in P). He describes 11 intertwined accounts that can be separated without creating breaks in the double narrative. For instance, the story of Dothan's and Abiram's rebellion against Moses flows as a complete story when separated from the story of Korah's rebellion. The only two clauses that merge the two stories—in Num. 16:24 and 27—appear to be editorial additions, as suggested by the fact that the extra words do not occur in the Septuagint. Friedman also gives lists of historical referents in the various sources, describes evidence suggesting the relationships among the sources, catalogs references in other biblical books (including allusions to P in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, suggesting P was already in existence at the time of the Exile), and points out marks of editorial work such as epanalepsis,<sup>109</sup> reconciling phrases, and framing devices. It is the convergence of all of these bodies of data that is the most powerful evidence for the Documentary Hypothesis.

#### THE HYPOTHESIS AS AN AID IN SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

Above we have suggested that the one-sided allusion in the Book of Mormon to the incident concerning the waters at Meribah makes more sense in light of the Documentary Hypothesis. Below we will offer seven additional examples showing how the hypothesis can shed light on LDS scripture.

The first four examples derive from the JST. In order to appreciate these examples, we must be able to apply an exegetical principle expressed by the Prophet Joseph himself: "I have [a] Key by which I understand the scripture[s]—I enquire what was the question which drew out the answer."<sup>110</sup> Sometimes when we read the JST, it is most helpful to focus

---

109. Epanalepsis (or "resumptive repetition")—in which the author interrupts himself and then repeats material from before the interruption in order to resume his main point—can, of course, be a rhetorical device used by a single author. See Larry G. Childs, "Epanalepsis in the Book of Mormon," in John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 165-66. The cases referred to by Friedman are more disjointed and seem to point towards redaction. For instance, in Ex. 6:12 Moses says, "How will Pharaoh listen to me, when I am uncircumcised of lips?" Then follows an Israelite genealogy, followed by a transitional summary of what had been said prior to the interruption. Then Moses says again in v. 30, "I am uncircumcised of lips, and how will Pharaoh listen to me?" This resumptive repetition appears to be an editor's mechanism for inserting a text into a pre-existing account and then returning to the flow of that account.

110. From the Joseph Smith Diary for January 29, 1843, kept by Willard Richards, in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 161.

on the question that gave rise to the textual modification rather than the specific, proposed answer to that question suggested by the JST. To illustrate, there are a number of Old Testament passages that portray the Lord as “repenting.”<sup>111</sup> The JST invariably reworks such passages so that the subject of the verb is not the Lord, but some human or humans. These changes are meant to avoid the theological implications of portraying the Lord, who does not sin (and therefore should need no repentance), as “repenting.” We know that this was Joseph’s concern because this is one of the few places where he actually explained his rationale for emending the text: “As it [the Bible] read it repented the Lord that he had made man. and also God is not a man that he should repent—which I do not believe—but it repented Noah that God made man.—this I believe. & then the other quotation stands fair.”<sup>112</sup> I submit that, if we put undue emphasis in Genesis 6:6 on Noah repenting, we risk misunderstanding the true import of the JST. The real point of the JST is not that Noah repented (which is simply a suggested resolution to the problem), but that the Lord did *not* repent. Understood in this way, we can see that in this particular passage the JST does not represent a restoration of text that was deleted from ancient Hebrew manuscripts; rather, the issue is one of proper translation of the received text. The Hebrew verb rendered “repent” in these KJV passages, *nicham*, means simply “to grieve” (without the heavy theological baggage of English “repent”). No modern translation uses the word “repent” in these passages. By emphasizing the question rather than the (tentative) solution, we can see that Joseph Smith’s prophetic instincts were excellent in this matter: the Lord indeed does not “repent.” If one is willing to read certain JST passages in this way, then the Documentary Hypothesis suggests that Joseph, on occasion, reacted to legitimate problems in the seams between the sources. Four illustrations follow:

*An Anti-Moses Text: Was Moses Circumcised?* Exodus 4:24-26 reads as follows:

[24] And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. [25] Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. [26] So he let him go: then she said A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.

The JST modifies this text as follows (additions are italicized, deletions are struck through):

111. E.g., Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:12, 14; 1 Sam. 15:11; 1 Chron. 21:15; Jer. 26:19; Amos 7:3, 6; and Jonah 3:10.

112. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 86 [from a discourse given October 15, 1843]. See also Barney, “Joseph Smith Translation and Ancient Texts,” 85-86.

[24] And it came to pass, ~~that the Lord appeared unto him as he was in~~ ~~by~~ the way, by ~~in~~ the inn. The Lord was angry with Moses, and his hand was about to fall upon him ~~that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him; for he had not circumcised his son.~~ [25] Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and ~~cut off the foreskin of circumcised~~ her son, and cast ~~it~~ the stone at his feet, and said, Surely thou art a bloody husband ~~art thou~~ to me. [26] ~~And the Lord spared Moses and~~ ~~So he~~ let him go, because Zipporah, his wife, circumcised the child. ~~And then she said, Thou art a bloody husband~~ ~~thou art, because of the circumcision.~~ And Moses was ashamed, and hid his face from the Lord, and said, I have sinned before the Lord.

The JST provides a reasonable explanation of this obscure incident. It gives the reason the Lord sought to kill Moses: Moses had not circumcised his son. It tastefully suggests that Zipporah threw the flint knife rather than her son's foreskin at Moses. And it makes explicit that the Lord spared Moses because Zipporah circumcised the child.<sup>113</sup>

There are, of course, other ways to read the passage. A possible alternative is to see Moses as becoming gravely ill at a resting place along the road. Zipporah interprets this illness as Yahweh's displeasure at Moses' own lack of circumcision. She circumcises their son with a flint knife and touches (KJV "cast" is erroneous) Moses' genitals with it ("feet" in the Old Testament is often a euphemism for the genitals), pronouncing Moses her "bridegroom of blood" (rather than the KJV's "bloody husband"). In effect, on this reading, Zipporah has performed a proxy ordinance of circumcision for the benefit of her ill husband, which the Lord recognizes. The expression "bridegroom of blood" is obscure, but it may have reference to the origins of circumcision rites, which were performed at puberty or marriage rather than in infancy.<sup>114</sup>

The JST is careful to ascribe the lack of circumcision only to Moses' son and not also to Moses himself.<sup>115</sup> Although the JST allows that Moses sinned in not circumcising his son, it protects him from the greater sin of not being circumcised himself, particularly in light of the requirement that one must be circumcised to partake of the Passover (see Ex. 12:48-49).

Why does Exodus contain a text with such a negative portrayal of Moses? The Documentary Hypothesis supplies an explanation. Although the sources considered both Moses and Aaron as great leaders from Israel's

---

113. Otherwise, the JST simply makes explicit things that are implied in the text. For instance, the JST clarifies that the "he" in v. 26 is the Lord; the New English Translation does the same.

114. According to Genesis 17:25, Ishmael was circumcised at age 13. A Hebrew word for "father-in-law," *choten*, literally means "the circumciser." The 1979 LDS KJV footnote *ad loc.* suggests that there is covenant significance to the expression "bridegroom of blood"; I agree with this suggestion.

115. At least one commentator agrees with this reading; see J. R. Dummelow, ed., *The One Volume Bible Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 53.

past, they reflected somewhat variant attitudes towards these leaders. Moses was the particular hero of E and D, which were meanwhile content to allow for the occasional denigration of Aaron in such stories as the golden calf and the leprosy of Miriam. In contrast, J and P were more pro-Aaron and willing to denigrate Moses as in the P account of the waters at Meribah (in Num. 20) or this account of the circumcision of Moses' son (J).

By protecting Moses in Exodus 4, the JST is partially harmonizing this J anti-Moses text to the more pro-Moses sentiments of E and D.

*Was the Name "Yahweh" Known to the Patriarchs?* Exodus 6:3 reads:

And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.

The JST revises this verse as follows:

And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob ~~by the name of~~. *I am the Lord* God Almighty; *the Lord* ~~but by my name~~ JEHOVAH. *And was I not my name known to unto them?*

This JST change turns on a classic contradiction that we have already identified. This P text reports that the patriarchs knew God by the name El Shaddai (the Hebrew here would be better transliterated as "El Shaddai" rather than translated, as the KJV does, into "God Almighty"). Yet J texts consistently use the name Yahweh (=KJV JEHOVAH) in the patriarchal narratives. The JST applies both names to God and, by cleverly turning a statement into a rhetorical question, suggests that the name Yahweh was indeed known to the patriarchs. In effect, the JST improves upon the deficient continuity between J and P reflected in this passage.<sup>116</sup>

*Did Moses See God's Face?* Exodus 33:20-23 read as follows:

[20] And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. [21] And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: [22] And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: [23] And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

This P text is consistent with P's perspective against blatant anthropomorphisms. It is inconsistent, however, with other biblical passages where

---

116. The Finnish Lutheran scholar Heikki Raissanen was deeply impressed by Joseph Smith's ability to discern problematic areas in the biblical text even without the benefit of critical scholarship. Among numerous other examples, he comments on the cleverness of Joseph's solution to the name of God problem in this passage. See Heikki Raissanen, "Joseph Smith und die Bibel: Die Leistung des mormonischen Propheten in neuer Beleuchtung," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 109, no. 2 (February 1984): 81-92, at 84.

characters are portrayed as having spoken to God. For instance, v. 11 of this same chapter reports that “the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” Once again, the JST resolves the problem by crafting an improved editorial seam:

[20] And he said *unto Moses*, Thou canst not see my face at *this time*, lest mine anger be kindled against thee also, and I destroy thee, and thy people: for there shall no man *among them* see me at *this time*, and live, for they are exceeding sinful. And no sinful man hath at any time, neither shall there be any sinful man at any time, that shall see my face and live. . . .

[23] And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen *as at other times*; for I am angry with my people Israel.

Note how the JST puts a temporal limitation on God being seen, due to his current anger. The JST clarifies that, as a general principle, it is *sinful* men that cannot see God and live.

*Could Levites be Priests?* In the context of the rebellion of Korah, Num. 16:10 reports the following words of Moses:

And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?

The JST emends “priesthood” to “high priesthood.” If Levites already had the priesthood, why would they need to seek that priesthood? The JST by adding the adjective “high” is acknowledging that Levites did hold the priesthood.

In P only the sons of Aaron could be priests; Levites were simply helpers. In the other sources, the priesthood was not limited to the Aaronids, and all Levites could be priests. In this P text Moses supports Aaron’s exclusive hold on the priesthood against Korah (Moses’ and Aaron’s cousin according to a P genealogy) and the other Levites. Therefore, once again the JST observes a contradiction between the sources and harmonizes that contradiction.

*Were El and Yahweh One God or Two?* One of the earliest Mormon assessments of the Documentary Hypothesis was offered by George Reynolds in 1881:

Some writers have maintained that throughout Genesis . . . there are traces of two original documents at least, some claim more. These two documents are characterized by giving different names to God. In the one he is called Elohim and in the other Jehovah. It appears never to have entered into the thoughts of these writers that possibly two different heavenly personages were intended.<sup>117</sup>

---

117. Reynolds, “Thoughts on Genesis,” as cited in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 111.

I believe that Reynolds makes a good point here, but that it cuts in precisely the opposite direction of what he intended. I view it as arguing in favor of the Documentary Hypothesis rather than against it. The problem with Reynolds's statement as it stands is that, canonically (that is, as the text reads today), it is abundantly clear that both Elohim and Jehovah are used to refer to the same God.<sup>118</sup> It is only when we look at the historical development of the canonical text that we begin to see clearly the origins of El and Yahweh as separate Gods.<sup>119</sup> Although such historical reconstruction might be possible without reference to the Documentary Hypothesis, in my view an application of that hypothesis greatly assists any such attempt at an historical analysis of the development and eventual convergence of these deities. Given the church's commitment to the principles set forth in "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve" (1916), I should think there would be at least some motivation to take the Documentary Hypothesis seriously, for once we do, Reynolds's statement then gains coherence.<sup>120</sup>

*Were Multiple Sanctuaries Permitted?* One of the first critics of the Book of Mormon, Alexander Campbell, noted that that book portrays temple worship as continuing in the New World, "when God's only house of prayer, according to his covenant with Israel, stood in Jerusalem."<sup>121</sup> This criticism has been repeated many times since, and has also been applied to the ongoing temple building program of the LDS church.

The first commandment of the Deuteronomic law code (see Deut. 12) was to sacrifice to God only in a single place. This principle was applied to the temple in Jerusalem, which became a significant feature of the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah. This centralization law seems, however, to have been a religious innovation. There is no evidence that this was an

---

118. For a demonstration of this point, see Boyd Kirkland, "Elohim and Jehovah in Mormonism and the Bible," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 77-93. Kirkland mentions the Documentary Hypothesis approvingly on p. 80, but I have not included his name in the table of Mormon reactions to the hypothesis because I cannot tell from this article whether he would fall under category 1, 2 or 3.

119. For an excellent introduction to such an historical reconstruction from an LDS perspective, see Daniel C. Peterson, "'Ye Are Gods': Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind," in Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson* (Provo: FARMS, 2000), 471-594.

120. We should be clear that the current LDS practice of equating God the Father with "Elohim" and God the Son with "Jehovah" is a modern convention, which does not necessarily match biblical or 19th-century LDS usage.

121. Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon with an Examination of its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of its Pretences to Divine Authority* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832), reprinted from *The Millennial Harbinger* 2 (February 1831): 85-96, in "Internal Evidences" no. 4.

ancient Israelite law; indeed, Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon all sacrificed at various altars without reproach.<sup>122</sup>

That the sources varied with respect to issues such as centralization of sacrifice can be illustrated by the references made to the tabernacle. The tabernacle is mentioned three times in E and never in J or D, but over 200 times in P. Critics of a fundamentalist bent assume that the Bible speaks with one voice on the required centrality of worship in the Jerusalem Temple, but it does not. Given that Lehi was of the tribe of Manasseh, that his family came from the north, and that there may be special prominence of E among the brass plates, it is hardly surprising that Lehi and his family did not accept the centralization of sacrifice at the *southern* site in the temple at Jerusalem, which a cynic might suggest only served to support the influence and income of the Jerusalem Temple priests (one of whom discovered the book of the law [associated with D] in the temple).

*Were Non-Aaronid Offerings Permitted?* Campbell similarly expressed surprise<sup>123</sup> that Lehi, who was not a Levite, would make an offering, as reflected in 1 Nephi 2:7: "And it came to pass that he [Lehi] built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God." As we have seen, the sources differed on this issue. In P only the sons of Aaron are priests and the other Levites are low level helpers, while in the other sources all Levites could be priests. Beyond that, Jereboam in the north appointed non-Levite priests at Beth-El. The Old Testament records numerous non-Levitical offerings. Gideon and Samuel were Ephraimites; Saul was a Benjamite; David and Solomon were of Judah.

The contradiction Campbell sees is not with a unified Old Testament, but with P. Sacrifices are never portrayed in P prior to the consecration of the tabernacle and priesthood in Exodus 40, and then only by Aaron and his sons. This unique perspective of P can be illustrated by a contradiction we have noted in connection with the story of Noah's ark. According to J, Noah took seven pair of clean and one pair of unclean animals onto the ark (Gen. 7:2-3), but according to P he only took one pair of each animal (Gen. 6:19; 7:8-9, 15). The reason for this discrepancy is that, according to J (Gen. 8:20-21), when the flood was over Noah built an altar and offered sacrifices of the clean animals. If he had not brought more than one pair of such animals, these sacrifices would have wiped out each species sacrificed. In P, however, Noah never offered sacrifice; therefore, only one pair of each species was necessary. While it is true that Lehi's sacrifice would have been anathema from the perspective of P, from a northern perspective it was perfectly appropriate.

---

122. See Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 102. Dozeman also mentions this point (97).

123. See Campbell, *Delusions*, "Internal Evidences" no. 1.

## CONCLUSION

The Documentary Hypothesis has resulted in a spectrum of Mormon reactions over the last century. The original liberal position of enthusiastic acceptance has largely given way to a still more liberal position that follows higher criticism even to the rejection of historical faith claims (category 1). The conservative position (category 6) rejects critical scholarship as in large measure evil; most Saints, however, do not know about the theory and simply make traditional assumptions. In the middle are those who accept the value of scholarship generally but reject many of its conclusions in this case as well as those who, like me, tentatively do accept the theory.

Mormons who accept the Documentary Hypothesis must face the issues of the source of the Pentateuch's prophetic authority if Moses did not write it as well as the fundamental incompatibility of the hypothesis with a doctrine of scriptural inerrancy. Although Mormons share these issues with other Christians and Jews, they also face issues relating to their own modern scripture. I have suggested that, if (as I believe) the sources are pre-Exilic, the Book of Mormon actually meshes very well with the hypothesis. Abraham 4-5 would seem to require a "loose" reading in light of the hypothesis. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to a Latter-day Saint's acceptance of the hypothesis is the very common assumption that the Book of Moses/JST is a pure textual restoration. If one is willing to apply a more eclectic reading to that scripture, then it is possible for a faithful Mormon to accept the hypothesis.

My misgivings over accepting the hypothesis include the role played at one time by anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic polemic in its formulation, the unfortunate influences of Hegelian philosophy and the extremes of Enlightenment rationalism, the academic politics involved in requiring young scholars to accept the theory in order to be able to pursue meaningful careers in academe, and the extreme confidence scholars often place in the highly detailed results of source criticism.

We have also described some reasons for caution. Archaeological considerations have caused some high profile scholars to change their minds and reject the hypothesis. We need to understand that we are not just talking about four documents; not only did those documents use prior written sources, but even the earliest sources were preceded by a long period of oral tradition. We have described the long parallel development between biblical and Homeric scholarship, which was broken in the middle of the 20th century. Literary structures have the potential to provide an alternate explanation for the phenomena underlying the hypothesis. Statistical linguistics may have the potential to make a significant contribution to the issue of a unified vs. multiple authorship of the Pentateuch, a potential not as yet fully realized. Finally, in recent years there has been something of a trend back towards canonical criticism; that is, simply studying the Pentateuch as it exists in its final form.

These misgivings and cautions notwithstanding, I do accept the Documentary Hypothesis. In my view, the evidence favoring the hypothesis is stronger than most people realize. It is not just a question of different sections using different names for God, which seems to be the popular conception. Rather, there are numerous doublets and triplets in the text. Extensive lists of terminology, contradictions, and other textual characteristics fit consistently into one or another of the matching stories of the doublets. There are also other indications of redaction, which have been assembled by scholars over a very long period of time.

If one does not insist on a fundamentalist or inerrantist approach to the scriptures, the Documentary Hypothesis actually provides some fascinating insights into Mormon scripture as I have attempted to illustrate by a number of examples.

So where do we go from here with respect to the issue of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch? The present article notwithstanding, I believe that for the foreseeable future the great majority of the membership of the church will continue to fall under category 5 and make traditional assumptions about the composition of the Pentateuch. The founding of an array of LDS publications with a scholarly orientation over the past quarter century has greatly benefitted the liberal and centrist positions; I expect those positions to continue to see modest growth over time. Conversely, the authority of category 6 largely derives from the ecclesiastical prestige of its adherents. Now that church leaders no longer rail against the Documentary Hypothesis over the pulpit, I anticipate that category 6 may see a modest decrease in influence over time.

Whatever the future may hold for continuing LDS interaction with the Documentary Hypothesis, I do believe that we need have no fear of the hypothesis. In my view, the correctness of that theory in its general outlines would by no means entail the incorrectness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.