

THE SOURCE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE:
AN OVERVIEW, EVALUATION, AND PROPOSAL FOR A
NEW METHODOLOGICAL STARTING POINT
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This research will attempt to give a brief overview of the rise of the Source Criticism of the Hebrew Bible along with successive modifications of the method as it continues to impact Biblical scholarship. Special attention will be paid to the Classical Documentary Hypothesis as articulated by Julius Wellhausen in the latter part of the nineteenth century, with a view toward evaluating the principal arguments that have been made in its defense.

After acknowledging the debt that is still due to the methodology in modern research, a final assessment of the more important presuppositional issues impinging on this approach will be undertaken. Our inquiry will be brought to a close with suggestions for how evangelical scholarship may emerge from the morass to set forth a coherent defense of the authenticity and authority of the Old Testament, while remaining in responsible dialogue with the more valuable conclusions of contemporary Biblical criticism.

One of the purposes for this study is to uncover the possibility that the old Documentary Hypothesis is still the surreptitious foundation even for the more fashionable and faddish criticisms of the day. If an adequate rebuttal can be offered to the very rudiments of the older theory, then possibly some of the current, more radical, dependent methodologies will be discredited along with it. Another purpose is to explore a plausible apology for the inspiration and integrity of the Old Testament text, without compromising the demands of scholarship or the dictates of logical analysis.

The question of the composition of the Pentateuch constitutes a watershed issue for Christian theology. Back in the mid-twentieth century, after evincing the influence that the Hebrew Scriptures had undeniably wielded on primitive New Testament theology, Emil Kraeling pointed out, “The Old Testament problem, therefore, is not just one of many. It is the master problem of theology...All theology that operates in any way with biblical heritage hangs in the air until it is settled.”¹ Similarly, William Henry Green would remind the world of Biblical scholarship in the late nineteenth century:

All the subsequent revelations of the Bible, and the gospel of Jesus Christ itself, rest upon the foundation of what is contained in the Pentateuch, as they either presuppose or directly affirm its truth. It is a question of primary importance, therefore, both in itself and in its consequences, whether the Pentateuch is a veritable, trustworthy record, or is a heterogeneous mass of legend and fable from which only a modicum of truth can be doubtfully and with difficulty elicited.²

Therefore, the problem of how the Pentateuch came into being is one of the more decisive questions confronting contemporary scholarship. Most other Biblical and theological concerns must wait for the resolution of this *primary* problem before they can even begin to proceed on their own merits.

It must be disclosed at the outset that the author of this research approaches the subject as an evangelical Christian. No effort is made to conceal his basic beliefs. In fact, these really need to be brought out into the open so that the reader may perceive the overall direction of this essay. The author’s fundamental conviction is the presupposition of a Theistic Universe in which miracles are possible and a revelation of the Creator’s will is even probable at some point in space-time history. From this conviction, a move

¹ Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament Since the Reformation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1955), 8.

² William Henry Green, *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1895, 1978), 31.

is made to the Creator's having chosen a special people to be the bearers of that revelation to all humanity through the prophetic gifts endowed to such ancient luminaries as Moses. Finally, from that chosen people descended Jesus the Messiah, whose lofty view of the Hebrew Bible is vital for working out the knotty problems that lie before this investigation.³

The outline of this paper is as follows: 1) Historical Development of Source Criticism, 2) Principal Arguments for the Documentary Hypothesis, 3) An Attempted Refutation of the Hypothesis, 4) Presuppositions of the Methodology, 5) Current Status of Source Criticism, and, 6) Conclusion. The conclusion will be reserved especially for drawing out salient implications of Source Criticism for Orthodox Christian faith, and for proposing a promising methodology of textual analysis that can be as coherent as possible and correspond with as many facts as time permits us to explore.

Before getting into the body of the discussion, a word or two about terminology is in order. This work will talk about "Source Criticism," the "Documentary Hypothesis," or the theories of Julius Wellhausen sometimes loosely and interchangeably. At other times, when more precision is required, the method under review may be called "The New Documentary Hypothesis,"⁴ the "Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis,"⁵ or even "the

³ The rough outline of this argument will be fleshed out a little more in a subsequent section.

⁴ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949, 1977), 143. Young adds that this designation applies especially to the theory after modifications by Rudolph Smend at the close of WWI. Smend added the component of more than one J source, *ibid*.

⁵ Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), 69. Soulen defines it as, "A theory concerning the origins of the Pentateuch which, though having numerous antecedents was most persuasively argued by K. H. Graf (1866) and Julius Wellhausen (1876-1884)..." He goes on to page 70 giving a brief run down of the theory. More exactly, it can be called the "Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen Hypothesis," in Young, *An Introduction*, 138. Young would make an even further distinction and dub Graf-Wellhausen as "the development hypothesis," though it is based on the "documentary hypothesis," *ibid*.

Newer Documentary Hypothesis.”⁶ Sometimes the shorthand “German Rationalism” may be used for Wellhausen’s hypothesis. For the most part, “Source Criticism” will be the preferred appellation.

I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOURCE CRITICISM

Composition of the Pentateuch: The Traditional View. For centuries, the accepted wisdom of orthodox Judaism and mainstream Christianity was that Moses was the principal author of the Pentateuch.⁷ Even a cursory reading of the New Testament reveals that this was the view of Jesus and the apostles (cf. Jno. 5:46-47; Jno. 10:34-35; Matt. 4:1-11; 19:7-8; 22:29, 43-45; Mark 7:9-12; Luke 16:17; 24:25; Acts 3:22-23; Heb. 10:28). While early Bible readers were aware of certain problematic portions of the text (as, for instance, the *Clementine Homilies* re: the account of Moses’ death⁸), most believed Moses to have authored the majority of the Pentateuch.

Peter Enns notes that “some acknowledgment of ‘substantial’ mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch has been the position throughout most of recorded Christianity and Judaism.”⁹ In the assessment of Daniel Mathewson, “prior to the rise of the critical spirit in biblical studies, the dominant (or doxical) approach to the biblical text was

⁶ Pauline A. Viviano, “Source Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, Steven L. McKenzie & Stephen R. Haynes, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 40.

In a nutshell, what we will be talking about is essentially the posture as explained by Carr: “From the late nineteenth century up to about 1975, most critical biblical scholars agreed on a quite specific model for the formation of the Pentateuch. According to this model, the ‘newer documentary hypothesis,’ the Pentateuch was formed out of the successive conflation of originally separate documents...” in David M. Carr, “Controversy and Convergence in Recent Studies of the Formation of the Pentateuch,” in *Religious Studies Review* (Jan 1997): 22.

⁷ R. E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1987), 17.

⁸ Young, 112. On pages 7-117, Young provides an informative account of early grapplings with such issues.

⁹ Peter Enns, “William Henry Green and the Authorship of the Pentateuch: Some Historical Considerations,” in *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* (Sep 2002): 398.

confessional and dogmatic.”¹⁰ By this, Mathewson means that the church simply took at face value the claims in the text about the Mosaic authorship of the books in question (while one may take issue with the labels “confessional and dogmatic”). But, what is interesting is his implicit division of the history of scholarship into *pre-critical* and *critical* stages.

Early Stages of the Theory. Friedman finds that the earlier history can be broken down into three stages that were spread out over roughly six hundred years. In the first stage, starting in about the eleventh century, students of the text still held to substantial Mosaic authorship, but thought that a few interpolations might have been made by later scribes.¹¹ In the second stage, beginning around the sixteenth century, analysts continued to maintain Mosaic authorship, but opined that later editors had reworked the books more thoroughly than earlier students were prepared to admit.¹² The third stage was characterized by the more radical tendency of some renaissance thinkers to deny outright the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Representatives of this school included Thomas Hobbes,¹³ Benedict Spinoza,¹⁴ and Richard Simon (who was a little more moderate, holding to a Mosaic core along with later additions).¹⁵

Despite such early questionings, some historians would label the work of the French physician, Jean Astruc, as the first truly “higher critical” investigation of the

¹⁰ Daniel B. Mathewson, “A Critical Binarism: Source Criticism and Deconstructive Criticism,” in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (Jun 2002): 3-28), 6.

¹¹ Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 18.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³ Young points out that Hobbes’ (1651) views were “hostile to the supernaturalism of revealed Christianity,” in Young, 19.

¹⁴ Harrison adds that Spinoza (1632-1677) “continued the tendencies of Hobbes, whose work he doubtless knew and utilized, in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, published anonymously in 1670.” In Harrison’s opinion, “his treatise was the first significant contribution to the modern discipline of Biblical criticism,” in R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

composition of the Pentateuch (Genesis in particular).¹⁶ The difference in the Divine names of “Elohim” and “Yahweh,” as used in the early chapters of Genesis, had attracted Astruc’s attention. He proposed that perhaps Moses had employed written sources in which the original composer had a predilection for one or the other of these names.¹⁷

Later, J. G. Eichhorn (in his *Einleitung* 1780-83) adopted this criterion and combined it with ancillary considerations, as the so-called “parallel accounts” and “doublets” in the narrative, in order to partition all of Genesis into two sources, the J (Jehovist) and the E (Elohist).¹⁸ Eventually, Eichhorn caved in to the burgeoning spirit of rationalism and jettisoned Mosaic authorship altogether.¹⁹

Before continuing with the documentary hypothesis per se, we notice a slight detour in its development that came in the form of rival the “Fragmentary Hypothesis.” For example, Alexander Geddes “argued that fragments of varying lengths, rather than sources or documents, lay behind these law codes.”²⁰ J. S. Vater accepted Geddes’ idea and expanded it to posit an evolutionary development of fragmentary laws codes, dating from the United Kingdom period, and coming down to Josiah’s reign as a “rediscovered” collection (621 B.C.).²¹

¹⁶ In *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1974 ed., s.v. “Criticism, Of the Bible,” by James Orr.

¹⁷ Ibid. William H. Green informs us that others had earlier suggested that Moses may have based his writings on existing sources (as Vitranga, 1707). The difference is that with the new critical direction with Astruc the suggestion is made that Moses simply incorporated, more or less intact, the divergent sources into his final edition, with minor editing between the seams, in Green, *The Higher Criticism*, 61.

¹⁸ Gleason L. Archer, Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964, 1974), 82.

¹⁹ Ibid. After a few pages of splendid summary of the most convincing arguments of early documentarians, William H. Green explains, “As at first propounded it did not conflict with Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.” But, when it was found that it could be extended beyond Genesis to other parts of the Pentateuch, it was on a collision course with Mosaic authorship, in Green, 67.

²⁰ Pauline A. Viviano, “Source Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, eds. Steven L. McKenzie & Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 38.

²¹ Ibid.

Another variation was the “Supplementary Hypothesis” as suggested by H. Ewald. He opposed the fragmentarian view on the ground of the “underlying unity of the book,” and proposed instead that an early (but not necessarily Mosaic) Elohist source formed the basis of the *Hexateuch* (Gen-Joshua). This, in turn, was supplemented by even earlier materials as, for example, the Decalogue.²²

Wilhelm M. L. De Wette contributed to the development of the hypothesis by suggesting that Deuteronomy was the “Book of the Law” discovered in the temple during the reign of Josiah around 621 B.C. (2 Kings 22).²³ But, the “discovery” of this work was so convenient for Josiah’s purposes of reformation (read, “centralization of the cultus”) that it is suspected to have been made to order just for the occasion.²⁴ With this proposal, the number of putative sources was increased from two (J and E)²⁵ to three (J, E, and D for “Deuteronomist”).

Subsequently, other scholars made contributions to the unfolding of the hypothesis, as H. Hupfeld (who divided E into E¹ and E², the former being dubbed P for the “Priestly” portion),²⁶ W. Vatke,²⁷ Abraham Kuenen,²⁸ and K. H. Graf.²⁹ The latter’s input (in 1866) was especially important with respect to the proposed order in which the supposed sources originated. Having “proved” that a portion of the P source was exilic

²² Harrison, *Introduction*, 15.

²³ Archer, *A Survey*, 82. (For useful information about the basic theology and philosophical positions of De Wette, see Kraeling, *The Old Testament*, 68f.)

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

²⁵ Orr writes, “These are placed in the 9th or 8th cents BC (cir 850-750), but are supposed to have been combined a cent. or so later (JE),” in *ISBE*, s.v. “Criticism, Of the Bible,” by Orr.

²⁶ Archer, 85.

²⁷ Viviano, “Source Criticism,” 39-40.

²⁸ Archer, 86.

²⁹ Young, 22.

or postexilic, the new order for the original documents stood at J, E, D, P.³⁰ Kuenen's contribution (1869) was to reunite the P sources which in Graf had been split into two.³¹

Emergence of a Hypothesis—Definitive Form by Wellhausen. As admirable as the gains by the early critics were, it was left to Julius Wellhausen to put the finishing touches on the theory and promulgate it far and wide, even outside of scholarly circles. As Young comments, "It was Julius Wellhausen (*Die Komposition des Hexateuchs*, 1876-7) who brought this hypothesis to the position of dominance."³²

Yet, Wellhausen did not really come up with any revolutionary ideas. Viviano avers, "Wellhausen's History of Israel is noted not so much for its originality as for the way in which he organized and built upon the work that had preceded him."³³ On the other hand, Wellhausen has been so influential in the field of Biblical criticism that his work may be compared to that of Darwin in the natural sciences.³⁴ His writings from 1876 to 1884 gave the theory "its most cogent and popular setting."³⁵ It will therefore be Wellhausen's work, basically, that attracts our attention in the balance of the present research.

II. PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF SOURCE CRITICISM

Against the Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch. The crux of the issue, of course, is whether or not Moses was the actual author of the Pentateuch. We do not need to be bogged down here in details about a possible amanuensis or intermittent

³⁰ Archer, 87.

³¹ Ibid., 86-87.

³² Young, 137.

³³ Viviano, 40.

³⁴ Herbert F. Hahn, *The Old Testament in Modern Research* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1954, 1956), 11.

³⁵ In *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Pentateuch," by D. A. Hubbard.

interpolations. This inquest is concerned more importantly with the *substantial* Mosaic authorship. This thesis Wellhausenism denies.

So, it is in order, first, to review the principal arguments its advocates make against the Mosaic authorship. They generally consider the asseveration that Moses did not write the Pentateuch as an “assured result” of Biblical criticism. As Norman Gottwald glibly writes, “One of the certain results of modern Bible study has been the discovery that the first five books of the Old Testament were not written by Moses.”³⁶ Whence comes such confidence? From such arguments as those marshaled below.

Ironically, it is from the pen of the stalwart Princeton champion of orthodoxy, William H. Green, that we have one of the better if succinct summaries of the chief evidence (though he enumerates them in order later to counter them).³⁷ He mentions 1) the criterion of the Divine names, 2) the alleged continuity of narrative when each of the putative sources is isolated from the other (especially E), 3) parallel passages in the same narrative, and 4) a suspected divergence of style and thought forms between the sources.³⁸ In the following lines, we will look more closely at the critics’ contentions (from various sources) as we focus on the principal objections to Mosaic authorship.

Differences in the Divine Names. As mentioned earlier, the alternation between the Divine names, Elohim or Yahweh, are thought to be an indication of composite sources. Edward Young names H. B. Witter as one of the first to assert the existence of

³⁶ Norman K. Gottwald, *A Light to the Nations: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 103.

³⁷ Green, 63 *passim*.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

two accounts of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2, and that these accounts can be distinguished by the use of Elohim or Yahweh.³⁹

Moreover, early advocates often cited Exodus 6:3⁴⁰ and juxtaposed it with such texts as Genesis 14:22 to “prove” composite sources. The idea was that the Elohist (in Exo. 6:3) realized that God had not been made known by the name Yahweh to the Patriarchs, while the Yahwist (Gen. 14:22) carried forward his narrative with this personal name for God on the lips of the patriarchs, gingerly unaware of E’s stricture.

This criterion of the Divine names was later applied to the rest of the Pentateuch and finally to many other books of the Hebrew Bible.⁴¹ It should be remembered that this criterion formed the basis of all subsequent criticism of the Pentateuch, which even now in practice presupposes the validity of this criterion to one degree or another.

Narratives about Moses are Inconsistent with His Authorship. The account of Moses’ death in Deuteronomy 34 has long been problematic for Mosaic authorship. Rabbinic tradition held that this part of the narrative was written by Joshua, Moses’ successor.⁴² But the difficulty with this suggestion was pointed out by Carlstadt, a contemporary of Martin Luther. Carlstadt contended that the style of chapter 34 is the

³⁹ Young, 118.

⁴⁰ In this passage, God said to Moses, “and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, Lord, I did not make Myself known to them” (all scripture citations taken from the NASB unless otherwise indicated). Of course, “Lord” here translates the tetragrammaton. Genesis 14:22 had said, as one example, “And Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth.’” “Lord” is from Yahweh and “God Most High” is from *El Elyon*.

⁴¹ Norman C. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), iv.

⁴² Clyde M. Woods, *The Living Way Commentary on the Old Testament—Deuteronomy* (Shreveport, LA.: Lambert Book House, 1972), 302.

same as the rest of the book.⁴³ Since Moses obviously did not write this, he therefore did not write the book as a whole.⁴⁴

In addition to this classic case, there are various third person references made to Moses throughout the Pentateuch which are deemed to be unlikely were Moses to have been the real author. One of the more problematic of these is in Numbers 12:3, the reference to Moses' meekness.⁴⁵ Friedman wryly remarks, "It is also said that Moses was the humblest man on earth: and normally one would not expect the humblest man on earth to point out that he is the humblest man on earth."⁴⁶

Chronological lapses or anachronisms. A number of alleged examples have been proffered over the years. One memorable example concerns the domestication of camels. Critics alleged that they were probably not domesticated before 1100 B.C.⁴⁷ Yet, we see they figure in some of the patriarchal narratives describing events supposedly happening long before the 12th century (cf. Gen. 12:16; 24:10f.). Therefore, we have an anachronism in the narrative.

Another problem is that Abraham pursued the Mesopotamian raiders as far as "Dan" (Gen. 14:14). But, this name was not yet given to that city, neither in the putative Patriarchal period nor even by Moses' own time. So, the anachronism must indicate an even later composition for the book.

⁴³ Friedman, 18-19.

⁴⁴ Young corroborates this anecdote and tells us that Carlstadt's real name was Andreas Bodenstein, in Young, 116-117. (It remains to be seen how much stock can be placed in such subjective criteria as those of language and style, especially since a change of subject matter might account for a change in the customary vocabulary, grammatical constructions, etc.)

⁴⁵ "(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)"

⁴⁶ Friedman, 18.

⁴⁷ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 338.

Differences in Diction and Style. As mentioned above, it is thought that diverse styles can be detected between the supposed sources. J is said to have a manner all of his own for presenting matters, a manner that differs markedly from E, D or P. S. R. Driver argued, “the literary style of P is strongly marked. If JE—and especially J—be free, flowing, and picturesque, P is stereotyped, measured and prosaic.”⁴⁸ Moreover, differences in subject matter and in the arrangement of the themes point to different underlying sources. Likewise, Aramaisms and (alleged) late Hebrew words were naturally linked to a late date of composition.⁴⁹

Distinctive Concepts about God and Man. One notorious set of concepts concerns the question of seeing God and living. Some passages say that a man cannot see God and live (Exo. 33:20). Yet others (as Exo. 24:9-11) say that men did see God (the seventy elders) and live. Such “discrepancies” must be indicative of double sources.

Parallel (Duplicate) Narratives/Legislations (Doublets). This is one of the more serious categories of the alleged discrepancies that seem pointing to multiple sources. It is believed that with these parallels and duplicates, the seams of the interwoven documents are clearly seen. Mathewson cites C. A. Simpson’s source critical defense in which are used “Repetitions, Contradictions and Chronological Differences” as evidences on behalf of the method.⁵⁰ As an example of “repetition,” Simpson instances Abraham’s using the wife-as-sister trick (Gen. 12:10-20; 20, cf. Isaac in 26:6-11). As an example of “contradiction,” he mentions, *inter alia*, Genesis 6:19-20 where Noah was told to take a

⁴⁸ S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Meridian Library, 1897, 1956), 129.

⁴⁹ Archer, 137.

⁵⁰ C. A. Simpson, *The Early Traditions of Israel: A Critical Analysis of the Pre-Deuteronomic Narrative of the Hexateuch* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), 21, 38-40 nn. 9-11, as cited in Mathewson, “A Critical Binarism,” 18.

pair of every animal into the ark, and 7:2-3 where he was to take seven pairs of the clean animals. And as a “chronological difference,” Simpson supposes that “Genesis 35 covers a period of 60 years when examined one way, but only 12 years when examined another way.”⁵¹

One of the classic examples concerns the alleged parallel accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2.⁵² Another is the apparent discrepancy between God resting on the seventh day and God’s still working on the seventh day. Wellhausen asseverates that, “The contradiction is indubitable when in Gen. ii. 2 it is said in the first place that on the seventh day god ended the work which He had made; and then that He rested on the seventh day from His work.”⁵³

With regard to the Flood Narrative of Genesis 6-9, it is believed that there are several textual inconsistencies serving as sign posts to at least two underlying sources. One dichotomy is “discovered” for the animals, first two pairs and then seven pairs (as noted above in Simpson).⁵⁴ Another mismatched “pair” is made up of the 40 days and then the 150 days for the duration of the flood.⁵⁵ And, critics appeal to the Noah’s sending a raven then a dove as evidence of multiple sources.⁵⁶

Such examples from the writings of source critics could be multiplied. Their intent in adducing them is to show multiple sources lying behind the present text of the

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Archer, 127.

⁵³ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*. Trans. Menzies and Black. (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1857, 1957), 115, n. 1.

⁵⁴ Oesterley and Robinson repeat this canard in W. D. E. Oesterley & Theodore H. Robinson. *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1958), 27.

⁵⁵ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 310.

⁵⁶ J. A. Emerton, “An Examination of Some Attempts to Defend the Unity of the Flood Narrative in Genesis: Part II,” in *Vetus Testamentum* (Jan 1988): 8.

Pentateuch. Multiple sources would imply that Moses could only have been the substantial author of the whole.

Wellhausen's Overall Reconstruction of the History of Israel. In addition to challenging *directly* the traditional authorship of the Pentateuch, Wellhausen also sought *implicitly* to overturn the traditional view by reversing the order of major historic events as they appear in a straightforward reading of the Bible.⁵⁷ Rather than seeing the extraordinary in-breaking of God into the life of the Israelite nation, through the instrumentality of Moses, in order to rescue them from Egyptian bondage and to inculcate in them a reverence for His identity and unity (the One True God), German rationalism posited instead an *evolutionary* development of the basic concepts of the religion of Israel (or mere *Judaism* as they were wont to view it).⁵⁸

Wellhausen's philosophical stance provided orientation to his entire approach to the critical questions of date and authorship. Assuming that primitive concepts (i.e., "primitive" according to his system) in a work must tie it into an earlier period, and conversely that advanced ("advanced," according to his scheme) ideas indicate late

⁵⁷ Allis summarizes the two prongs of the documentarians' argument as 1) "theory of *differences*" and 2) a principle of "*development*." *Differences* within the text implied at a variety of original sources; *development* of Israel's religion along evolutionary lines gave the lie to the record as Judaism would have us to believe it, and would leave Moses out of the picture as having lived too early to have articulated the concepts that are finally attributed to him, in Oswald T. Allis, *The Old Testament: Its Claims and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 240-241.

Allis' assessment is supported by Wellhausen's own description of his purpose. In his *Prolegomena*, pages 141f., Wellhausen tries to coordinate the documentary hypothesis with his own developmental explanation. For instances, 1) J knows nothing of a separate priesthood. But later 2) the priests take on a more prominent role, *ibid.* 145. Later still 3) in D, they fulfill that role only modestly. But lastly, 4) "it is dealt with in very real earnest in the Priestly Code," *ibid.* Why the overview? Wellhausen summarizes his basic argument: "Thus in the question of the order of sequence of this two great bodies of laws, the history of the tradition leads us to the same conclusion as the history of the cultus," *ibid.*, 295. As may be observed in the evaluation section later, it seems that he has stacked the deck in his favor, that his arguments are self serving, and that they are question-begging. In effect, he derives the separate documents (the tradition) by the history (of the cultus), and he proves the history by the separate documents!

⁵⁸ Hahn, *The Old Testament in Modern Research*, 103. Here Hahn writes of "Wellhausen's strictly evolutionary interpretation."

dating, it might not be too injudicious to say that his' was a scissors-and-paste approach to the whole Hebrew Bible. At times, it appears that Wellhausen was willing to force the data to fit his plan for elucidating the evolution of Israel's religions, rather than allowing the text to speak on its own.

Some samples of such forced fits will be given below. But, first, Daniel Mathewson supplies a very useful and succinct summary of Wellhausen's conception of the denouement of *Judaism* from primitive beliefs:

Wellhausen, building on ideas that had been forming for well over a century, argued that the Pentateuch is composed of four main documents (JEDP), with the P document (called 'Q' by Wellhausen) unknown until the time of the Chronicler in post-exilic Israel. The legal, institutional version of 'Judaism', therefore, did not exist before the exile: pre-exilic Israel did not have a strict monotheism, it was not driven by a systematic code of laws, it had few purity regulations. Its religion was the natural religion of an agrarian people—a religion wherein the great prophets, who responded to Yahweh spontaneously, were at the religious apex. The post-exilic Priestly system, however, became abstract and rigid, with the legalistic Pharisaism of the New Testament the logical conclusion.⁵⁹

This explanation for the unfolding of Israel's religion serves as the scaffolding for Wellhausen's higher critical views as well.

As examples of his "evidence," Wellhausen avers that in the earliest period, the place of worship did not matter. There were altars all around. Worship was offered in such places with impunity.⁶⁰ Only later was an attempt made to centralize the worship for political reasons. Thus, the writer of the Kings got it wrong when he ascribed religious motivation to the construction of the temple. Frankly, the Kings' posture about

⁵⁹ Mathewson, 7.

⁶⁰ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 17-20. On page 38, he proceeds to allege that the account of the patriarchs has been doctored up to make it appear as though they did not worship at many places, when in fact they *must* have done so (as per Wellhausen's scheme, PG).

the temple is “unhistorical,” and merely “imports into the purpose of its foundation the significance which it has acquired in Judah shortly before the exile.”⁶¹

Moreover, he attempts to make a nexus between the later concentration of the cultus in Jerusalem to the evolution of a “monarchial conception of God.”⁶² Monotheism as an ideology, then, was motivated by political considerations.

De Wette’s vision of Deuteronomy’s being the “Book of the Law” found by Hilkiah on the eve of Josiah’s reform is also endorsed.⁶³ According to documentarians, Deuteronomy’s implicit purpose was to do battle with the notion of multiple places for sacrifice. It was to command the people to come to Jerusalem for the cultus (and consequently rally around the reign of Josiah, to secure his rule).⁶⁴ But, Wellhausen is aware that this is not the explicit intention of Deuteronomy, so he adds, “One step indeed is taken towards investing it with an historical character, in so far as it is put into the mouth of Moses....”⁶⁵ Wellhausen’s postulated provenance for Deuteronomy would, of course, make it a “pious forgery.”

Along the similar lines, Wellhausen posited that the temple was, in point of time, first. Later, scribes invented the notion of the tabernacle as its precursor in the wilderness

⁶¹ Ibid., 20-21.

⁶² Ibid., 26-27.

⁶³ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 105, “Josiah had published Deut and had made it the Book of the Covenant...(621 B.C.).” He also asserts that the final form of the Pentateuch as we have it was introduced by Ezra. On page 104, he asserts that the source, P, just projects back onto the *tabula rasa* of the wilderness its (so-called) wilderness legislation. He adds, “The centralisation of the cultus, the revolutionizing influence of which is seen in the Priestly Code, is begun by Deuteronomy.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., 36.

merely to add “legitimacy” to the new project. “For the truth is, that the tabernacle is the copy, not the prototype, of the temple at Jerusalem.”⁶⁶

Further on down into the prophetic period, Wellhausen argues that the prophets felt that the Lord did not want sacrifices, but justice and piety. Thus, P did not exist in the “Torah” before prophets (cf. Jer. 6:19, 7:21).⁶⁷ But in a strange twist, Wellhausen seems to answer his own argument subsequently, as he cites Jeremiah 17:26 to say that the prophet was not really against the cultus as such.⁶⁸

As a riposte to a traditionalist reaction to his thesis, he admits that a “lifeless existence of the law” (i.e., not being faithfully practiced) was hypothetically possible as an explanation for what the prophets had in mind. But, this would not prove that the law of sacrifices went as far as back to Moses, but only to some intermediate point in history.⁶⁹ No doubt, traditionalists could have easily replied, but that is precisely the point! Israel was denounced for exactly that, a lifeless adherence to the law.⁷⁰

Obviously, Wellhausen does not have a high view of the overall historicity of the Hebrew Scriptures. Chronicles simply fabricates detailed stories, “out of this plan of writing history, as it is euphemistically called.”⁷¹ Wellhausen writes of “unhistorical character” of Manasseh paying tribute to Esarhaddon (despite an inscription from Assyria

⁶⁶ Ibid. 37. On page 39, he continues to cast doubt on the historicity of the tabernacle and has problems in particular with its ornate design for so primitive a period. The insinuation is that the Israelites were not capable of such advanced techniques as so early a period.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁰ Therefore, Wellhausen’s admission is contrary evidence to his own hypothesis. It would prove that his reconstruction of the events is wrongheaded. And that would open the door once again to removing his hypothesis as an obstacle for accepting the traditional view. (More will be said later by way of evaluation.)

⁷¹ Ibid., 207.

which he cavalierly dismisses.)⁷² Chronicles is just “an apocryphal amplification” of Kings as midrash (2 Chr 24:27 and 13:22).⁷³

Of course, “we attain no historical knowledge of the patriarchs....”⁷⁴ Yet, these materials about them are “not mythical but national.”⁷⁵ About Abraham, he avers that he “is somewhat difficult to interpret. That is not to say that in such a connection as this we may regard him as a historical person; he might with more likelihood be regarded as a free creation of unconscious art.”⁷⁶ Contra Hupfeld and others, who had maintained that many details about life in wilderness and the making of the tabernacle tend to support the accuracy of the narrative, Wellhausen thinks that these details “do not prove them to be reliable.” He then insinuates that it was just the Hebrew habit to invent such details in order to lend verisimilitude to the narrative!⁷⁷

With regard to Sisera’s death (Judges 4-5), Wellhausen finds all kinds of discrepancies.⁷⁸ And, concerning the narrative in 2 Sam 7:2-17 of how Israel was delivered out of Philistine trouble because they “came not more into the coasts of Israel,” Wellhausen confidently sniffs, “There cannot be a word of truth in the whole narrative.”⁷⁹ Thus, his position did not allow him to see much, if any, correspondence between the statements in the narratives and the empirical history as it actually transpired.

He notices, for instance, the pieces of furniture for the temple not mentioned in Ezekiel. From this he concludes that the prescription for the use of such items (the

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 227.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 318.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 320.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 347-348.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 240-241.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 248-249.

golden table) had not yet been given (until P).⁸⁰ Yes, 1 Kings 7:48 mentions the golden altar *and* the golden table, but this had to be work of post-exilic interpolator trying to supply the missing ingredient!⁸¹

Thus, the source critical methodology came to a climax in the writings of Julius Wellhausen. After slowly developing over a number of centuries, the Documentary Hypothesis was a force to be reckoned at the close of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, its assumed history of the evolution of Israel's religion and its literary partitioning of the Old Testament had become the dominant viewpoint in seminaries and universities on the Continent and in Anglo-American circles.⁸²

Resistance to Rationalistic Source Criticism. However, Wellhausenism was not without its detractors. Powerful opposition arose both in and out of traditional orthodox circles. Challenge to the *presuppositions* of the hypothesis came from E. C. Bissell in 1885, and later to its *literary analysis* from Geerhardus Vos in 1886.⁸³ Earlier, the translation into English (1847) of Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg's defense of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch had been a help to conservative scholarship in England and America in their struggle with rationalistic criticism.⁸⁴ H. Ch. Haevernich and C. F. Keil joined Hengstenberg with their own resistance to destructive criticism.⁸⁵

Hahn rather superciliously dismisses the opposition of religious conservatives (as James Orr, for example) "who were motivated by an essentially theological interest," and as failing "to understand the purposes of historical research."⁸⁶ He does, however, have

⁸⁰ Ibid., 66-67

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Harrison, 29-32.

⁸³ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁴ Archer, 85.

⁸⁵ Young, 22.

⁸⁶ Hahn, 23.

accolades for the work of B. D. Eerdmans who opposed rationalism's reconstruction of the religious history of the Hebrews on strictly "objective" grounds.⁸⁷

Staunch resistance arose in some (erstwhile) bastions of conservatism, as for example Princeton University, under the leadership of William Henry Green.⁸⁸ Later champions of twentieth-century orthodoxy included Robert Dick Wilson of Princeton,⁸⁹ R. K. Harrison,⁹⁰ Umberto Cassuto of Hebrew University of Jerusalem,⁹¹ Edward C. Young,⁹² and Gleason L. Archer, Jr.⁹³

Other attacks would come from the Form-Critical methods of the early twentieth century,⁹⁴ and from the remarkable finds of archeology that did not square with the interpretation given by Wellhausen's development hypothesis.⁹⁵ What is of note here is that many of these challenges were not launched from faith-commitments per se but from (what Hahn would hail as) more "objective," historical scholarship.

III. AN ATTEMPTED REFUTATION OF THE HYPOTHESIS

A General Response to German Rationalism. In the first place, as Young notes, "the theory is unnatural."⁹⁶ The Documentary Hypothesis is almost counter-intuitive,

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Enns, "William Henry Green and the Authorship of the Pentateuch," *JETS*: 385-403. (This researcher would be remiss if he did not also acknowledge the valuable contribution of J. W. McGarvey, President of the College of the Bible, Lexington, Ky., to the American Restoration Movement's struggle with destructive criticism around the turn of the century. See J. W. McGarvey, *Biblical Criticism* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1956).

⁸⁹ See Robert Dick Wilson *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959).

⁹⁰ (whose *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1969, informs some of this discussion)

⁹¹ See Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch*. Trans. Israel Abrams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1941, 1961), and also his *On the Book of Genesis. Part I*. Trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1944, 1961).

⁹² In his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1949.

⁹³ In his *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Moody Press, 1964.

⁹⁴ Harrison, 35-38.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 62-66.

⁹⁶ Young, 132.

especially given a continuous reading of the Old Testament text. It just seems a strained interpretation of the straightforward narrative.

Lacks Empirical Proof. In the second place, despite claims by its defenders of having ample corroboration of the chief components of Source Criticism, as a kind of cumulative case, the hypothesis remains just that—a hypothesis. Not one shred of empirical evidence (or primary proof) has ever been adduced for the existence of the alleged separate documents (JEDP),⁹⁷ though admirable attempts in that direction have been made.⁹⁸

Relies on Internal Evidences. Absent empirical evidence, at best internal considerations could demonstrate a probable case, but fall short of conclusive proof. With respect to nailing down the *terminus ad quo* for the composition of Genesis, Otto Eisfeldt has admitted:

This is made extraordinarily difficult by the fact that unequivocal references to events which can be precisely determined chronologically do not exist in any of the threads and that one is almost exclusively dependent here on literary, cultural,

⁹⁷ Kitchen, 492. Here, Kitchen chides the source critics for having no empirical data. He affirms, “the basic fact is that there is *no* objective independent evidence for any of these four compositions (or for any variant of them) anywhere outside the pages of our existing Hebrew bible...they exist *only* in the minds of their modern creators,” *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Tigay attempts to provide such proof in Jeffrey H. Tigay, “An Empirical Basis for the Documentary Hypothesis,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (Sep 1975): 329-342. Tigay thus tacitly concedes the weakness of the theory as long as it stands without empirical backing. His basic approach is to compare a proto-Samaritan MS of the Pentateuch found at Qumran with the MT. But, this researcher believes that he commits the formal logical *fallacy of the undistributed middle* in the manner of 1) A = B; 2) C = B; 3) thus, C = A. See Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998), 275.

Kaufman comes up with a similar approach to that of Tigay, but using the Temple Scroll found at Qumran instead as the test case, in Stephen A. Kaufman, “The Temple Scroll and Higher Criticism,” in *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1982): 22-43. Kaufman’s claims are a little more moderate than Tigay’s. But, Kaufman’s assumption is that the Temple Scroll and the MT were produced in a similar way, the very point to be proved.

For a similar endeavor, using computer-assisted statistical analyses, see Cornelius B. “Statistical Analysis of Genesis Sources,” in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (Sep 2002): 75-105. But Houk confesses that his research is “exploratory and limited,” *ibid.*, 76. Even with all these sophisticated techniques, the fact remains that, to date, not one MS has ever been located that would corroborate the independent existence of any of the putative sources.

intellectual, and religious historical criteria which are to a considerable extent ambiguous and, therefore, scarcely permit an entirely clear decision.⁹⁹

Moreover, even the internal evidence is not that clear-cut. It is only implicit.

And, as will be demonstrated below, the cogency of the argumentation depends on the *initial point* of departure (or the presuppositions of the investigator). David M. Carr comments on the divergent interpretations found in the critics' investigations, even of the same evidence. This variety "indicates just how approximate our tools are, particularly for a text-immanent analysis that seeks to reconstruct the formation of a text purely on the basis of surface features in the text itself."¹⁰⁰ While often dubbed a "scientific approach" by its advocates, source criticism remains a "science" that to date has not been tested by the usual scientific procedures.¹⁰¹

Circular Reasoning. The theory has often been charged with the fallacy of *petitio principii*, or begging the question. The problem is that it posits its conclusions before it even begins an inductive examination of the facts.¹⁰² A case in point is seen in Hahn's

⁹⁹ In *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Genesis," by Otto Eissfeldt.

¹⁰⁰ David M. Carr, "Controversy and Convergence in Recent Studies of the Formation of the Pentateuch," in *Religious Studies Review* (Jan 1997): 29.

¹⁰¹ One wonders if it is even testable in *principle*. Whenever contrary evidence is brought forward, Wellhausen easily salvages his theory by invoking the work of the unknown redactor(s). This leaves his hypothesis virtually unassailable. With the redactor ready at hand, the hypothesis is almost *unfalsifiable*. But, by parity of principle, why would it not therefore be *unverifiable* as well? Since, as will be seen, Wellhausen's evolutionary scheme grew out of the same milieu from which would spring logical positivism (with such attendant notions), one wonders why such criticism would not have been cogent for the classic documentarians?

In critiquing Harold Bloom's blasphemy about J being a comedic woman (in *The Book of J*, Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), Bruce Waltke says that even Bloom admits it is nearly an impossible task to unravel the sources put together by the alleged redactor. "Sir Edmond Leach likened the isolating of the Pentateuch's sources to 'unscrambling an omelette.'" See Bruce Waltke, "Harold Bloom and 'J': A Review Article," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Dec 1991): 514. It is the omelet simile that strikes us as apropos for describing the whole Wellhausen hypothesis.

¹⁰² However, the critics may reply that this is the nature of hypothesis testing in all science (the method of verificationism). A thesis is set forth, and then an investigation is made to see if the facts verify the thesis. On the other hand, there is a difference in (heuristically) setting forth a thesis to be tested, and in actually assuming the soundness of that thesis from the outset in order to lend cogency to the very evidences themselves, evidences that are cogent if—and only if—that thesis is true.

rather sympathetic description of the methodology. After admitting that the liberal critics were influenced by “the thought forms of the time” (i.e., evolution), Hahn explains:

This is not to say that the work of a liberal critic was no more objective than that of a conservative theologian. There is a great difference between a dogma assumed to be true from the start and a hypothesis to be tested in the light of the facts. The liberal critics would have been the first to agree that the evolutionary view of Old Testament history could be maintained only as the result, not the presupposition, of a critical examination of the relevant evidence. But the conception of historical development seemed to them an inevitable deduction from the evidence of successive changes in the religious institutions of Israel. The only historical reconstruction possible on the basis of the sources was one which showed an evolutionary growth.¹⁰³

The glaring fallacy with the critics’ argument (as outlined by Hahn) is that the “conception of historical development” (i.e., the evolutionary hypothesis à la Wellhausen) is the very system which provided the framework for interpreting the literary data, or the so-called “evidence of successive changes in the religious institutions of Israel.” And the literary data supposedly bolstered the veracity of the concept of development. The framework informed the data; the data informed the framework.¹⁰⁴ This is crass circularity, no matter how we slice it.

The School is Not Self-Consistent. The documentary hypothesis is not as coherent as its proponents might pretend. “A cursory glance at the array of post-Wellhausen publications reveals” the striking fact of “the lack of agreement among these critics.”¹⁰⁵ As a generic example, by one criterion, one section should be attributed to J, but by another (of their own) criterion, it should be assigned to E.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Hahn, 10.

¹⁰⁴ In effect, Wellhausen and company were saying, “We know the documents to be late forgeries, because the religion had developed along evolutionary lines (precluding that the more developed ideas would be found in early documents); and, we know that the religion had developed along evolutionary lines because of the (chronological-laden) data in the documents.”

¹⁰⁵ J. Coppens, *The Old Testament and the Critics*. Trans. Edward A. Ryan and Edward W. Tribbe. (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1942, 1952), 48.

When confronted with an apparent incongruence in their theory, its advocates' basic rebuttal is to fall back on the hypothetical redactor (the key player), but whose actual existence has no more than inferential proof.¹⁰⁷ With such an elastic methodology, one could prove nearly any aberrant idea about the Bible.

¹⁰⁶ Edward Young, in looking at the Divine Names criterion, shows how Ilgen actually applied some of Astruc's J passages to an E writer. "Why should two such competent men come to opposite conclusions? Is it not possible that the whole process of partitioning writing into various documents is very subjective?" See Young, 123.

¹⁰⁷ But, it must be confessed that this temptation besets the conservative investigator at times. For example, W. H. Green, from a conservative viewpoint, appeals to alleged later interpolators as an explanation for anachronisms in the text, in Green, 51. So, there is nothing wrong in principle with postulating the existing of editors or interpolators—within reason. The problem with Source Criticism is its preference for multiplying redactors upon redactors. In so doing, it often falls upon the sharp edges of Ockham's razor.

