

SESSION TWELVE

SOURCE ANALYSIS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

In the field of Old Testament studies, one of the areas of concern for all scholars (whether they be conservative or liberal) is the matter of "higher criticism." This involves the investigation and determination of the authorship and dates of each book of the Old Testament canon. In the pursuit of these kinds of questions, some scholars have sought to identify the sources considered to underlie a particular book or document (literary-critical activities). This kind of approach to the Old Testament is generally referred to as "Literary Source Analysis."

One of the theories arising from this type of approach is what is known as the *JEDP Theory*. According to this theory, some scholars claim that through a very rigorous analysis of the OT books, they have been able to isolate and identify the various literary strata lying behind the final compositions. For example, they would claim that the book of Genesis is a merged composition of numerous smaller documents that were woven together through a lengthy process involving several centuries, and even reworked at various times. In general, the outcome of this approach has been a denial of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and a late dating for the books themselves.

II. THE HISTORY OF THE METHOD

A. Early Analysis

1. Early Forerunners¹

As early as AD 1689, a theologian by the name of Campegius Vitringa in a work entitled *Observationes Sacrae* suggested that Moses had access to ancient sources from the patriarchal period. H. B. Witter (1711) was apparently the first to suggest that the divine names could be used as a criterion for identifying and analyzing the sources used by Moses.

2. Jean Astruc (1684-1766)

A Frenchman named Jean Astruc attempted to use the divine names to analyze the book of Genesis. His work was the beginning of Pentateuchal source-criticism proper. According to Astruc, Moses compiled Genesis by dividing up these ancient memoirs that he had access to and reassembling them so as to provide a continuous narrative. Astruc took note of the two main sources as being the Jehovistic (YHWH) and the Elohist (Elohim). However, he concluded that a more thorough analysis was necessary which would take into account other

¹ For a helpful survey of Jewish and Christian scholars who questioned various aspects of Mosaic authorship, see Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 60-62.

sources. Despite the subjectivity of his work, he did maintain that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch.

3. J. G. Eichhorn

The Age of Enlightenment brought on more interest in the "scientific analysis" of the Bible. More than anything else, it was the writings of J. G. Eichhorn (1780-83) that influenced OT study. Eichhorn, a rationalist who had given up a belief in the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, wrote a three-volume work entitled *Einleitung in das alte Testament* which earned him the title "father of Old Testament criticism." Concerning him, Harrison writes,

Eichhorn extended the criteria postulated by Astruc for documentary analysis of the Pentateuch by suggesting that the means for differentiating between the underlying sources should include diversities of literary style and consideration of words or phrases peculiar to one or the other of the documents previously isolated.²

Not only did Eichhorn take Astruc's work into greater detail, but he gave up Mosaic authorship in the process.

B. The Fragmentary Hypothesis

A Scottish Roman Catholic theologian named Alexander Geddes (in two works published between 1792 and 1800) postulated that the Pentateuch was put together in Solomon's time from a number of fragments, some of which existed before the time of Moses.

In another work published in 1807, W. M. L. De Wette confused the matter even further by maintaining that the different books were compiled by separate redactors who drew upon independent fragmentary sources. Furthermore, De Wette was the first to suggest that Deuteronomy was composed in the time of Josiah, being essentially the Book of the Law discovered during his reign. This led to the recognition of the "D" source (Deuteronomistic).

C. The Supplementary and Crystallization Hypothesis

Another German scholar named Heinrich Ewald (ca. 1823) maintained that the Elohist source was basic for the composition of the Pentateuch and Joshua.³ He then suggested that this work had been supplemented by the addition of older sections such as the Decalogue. Finally, a compilation of sources (Jehovistic in character) were placed in the basic Elohist document. In essence, Ewald was suggesting that at different periods, the books underwent a reworking each time new additions were incorporated.

D. The Documentary Hypothesis

Hermann Hupfeld in 1853 began to question the unity of the so-called Elohist source, concluding that E was actually the product of two writers (both of whom had employed the term Elohim).⁴ This

²R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1969), 14.

³ Ewald, *The Composition of Genesis Critically Examined*.

⁴ Hupfeld, *The Sources of Genesis*.

secondary Elohist source was thought by Hupfeld to have manifested distinct priestly tendencies. Hence, Hupfeld referred to this secondary Elohist source as "P" (priestly source).

With this suggestion by Hupfeld, there were now four recognized sources: E, J, P, and D. Hupfeld postulated that a redactor or editor had been responsible for reducing the four originally separate sources to their present form. This anonymous "redactor" was useful to the theory, being a basis for explaining problem areas in the text, such as textual obscurities, chronological and topographical difficulties, etc.

Karl Heinrich Graf, writing in 1865, did a further study of Hupfeld's P source. His theory, however, was that the Priestly source indicated a date of composition subsequent to the contents of the book of Deuteronomy. Since Deuteronomy was already believed to be from the time of Josiah (about 622 BC), Graf assigned the P source to the post-exilic period and associated it with the promulgation of the Law in the time of Ezra.

A Dutch scholar named Abraham Kuenen felt that the J source was basic to the Pentateuch, rather than E (as had generally been believed). Thus, he reversed the order suggested for the formulation of the Pentateuch, and concluded with the order: J,E,D,P.

E. Julius Wellhausen

The basic theory received its classic expression in the work of Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs* (1876-77). Wellhausen, himself, had studied under Ewald. Harrison gives this description of Wellhausen's conclusions:

In consequence he regarded the Pentateuch as essentially of composite origin, consisting of a Jehovistic source (J), dated in the ninth century B.C.; an independent Elohist document (E), coming from the eighth century B.C.; the basic content of the book of Deuteronomy (D), which was assigned to the time of King Josiah (640/39 -609 B.C.); and a Priestly source (P), from about the fifth century B.C. . . . the Jehovistic author compiled a narrative document from the sources J and E, and this was supplemented by the addition of Deuteronomy in the time of Josiah. Leviticus 17–26 was added to the Priestly document somewhat after the time of Ezekiel, while the remainder of the priestly material in the Elohist source was compiled by Ezra. At a subsequent period the entire corpus was revised and edited to form the extant Pentateuch, perhaps by about 200 B.C.



Today, the results of Wellhausen are accepted *in some form* by most critical scholars. Although new theories continue to emerge and many contemporary scholars (even critical ones) are abandoning the classical expression of the JEDP theory, **source analysis** is still a general assumption by these scholars for the origin of the Pentateuch. This is a basic assumption, for instance, underlying the *BDB* Hebrew lexicon. Those who hold to the classical JEDP sources generally date J to 950 BC; E is dated later to the 9th century; D is still dated about 622; and P in the 5th or early 6th century.

III. DESCRIPTION AND SUPPORT OFFERED FOR THE METHOD

A. Purpose of the Method

The purpose of literary source analysis is to analyze the literary strata behind the present form of the OT by separating out the prior written documents, describing them and arranging them in chronological order, and reconstructing the process whereby they were combined to form the OT as we have it.

B. Support Offered for the Method

1. Changes in the Divine Names

The J source uses the name YHWH, while the P and E sources use the name Elohim (up through Exodus 3).

2. Linguistic Usage

The different sources are also said to refer to people or places by different terms. For example, the mountain of Moses is supposedly called Sinai by the J source but Horeb by the E source. The inhabitants of the land are called Canaanites by the J source but Amorites by the E source.

3. Diversity of Ideas

In comparing men to God, J concentrates on the nearness of God, while E concentrates on the remoteness of God. Regarding God's speaking to Hagar, the J source has God speaking to her presently (Gen 16:7); with E, he speaks to Hagar from heaven (21:17). When YHWH appears, J gives the impression that men are not afraid (Ex 3:5), while E suggests that men are afraid (Ex 3:6). In regard to ethical issues, such scholars claim that J is not sensitive to ethical issues (Gen 12:10–13:1), while E is (Gen 20:12ff).

The P source is said to make its own contributions. The P source has man offering sacrifices only after the giving of the Law at Sinai, whereas J and E have sacrifices all the way through. P is also said to emphasize certain things before the Law: the Sabbath, avoidance of blood and respect for life, and the practice of circumcision.

4. Literary Phenomena

a. Doublets: this is evidenced by the retelling of the same story, supposedly with differences.

Examples would be: (1) when Abraham lied about Sarah, once at Egypt (12:11) and another time at Philistia (ch 20); (2) the Hagar story, provided by J in Gen 16 and by E in Gen 21; and (3) the recording of the Decalogue, by J in Ex 34 and by E in Ex 20.

b. The interruption of a story by the insertion of extraneous material.

c. The latter resumption of a broken thread (picking up the story latter on).

IV. EVALUATION OF THE METHOD

A. Assumption of an Evolutionary View of Israel's Religion

Wellhausen's conclusions in regard to the documentary hypothesis rested on a faulty presupposition regarding the history of Israel. His approach was based on the German philosophy of Hegel and the application of the "evolution principle," i.e., that Israel's religion evolved from a simple form to a

more complex form as a result of reaction to various events in her history. Supposedly Israel's worship was originally a crude nature worship, involving the worship of one God among many, along with many centers of worship. The prophetic movement led to the priestly stage with its emphasis on external ceremonial worship, and it was at this later stage that monotheism was embraced. Thus, the monotheistic elements in the Pentateuch were written at a late date as an attempt to bring support to this viewpoint, not because it was there all along. Supposedly, the prophetic teachings concerning monotheism led to the centralization of cultic worship in Jerusalem. Harrison notes,

Wellhausen then applied his conclusion that the Mosaic legislation was the basic code of post-exilic Judaism rather than the starting-point for the development of Israelite religious institutions to a reconstruction of Hebrew religion. Rejecting current theological interpretations in favor of Hegelian principles of causation and evolution, he envisioned the early religious activity of Israel in terms of primitive impulses of an animistic character; consequently, he dismissed as unhistorical the sources which described patriarchal religion as monotheistic in nature.⁵

Most scholars today would not agree with Wellhausen's particular construction of Israel's history, but his influence is still felt in terms of this evolutionary viewpoint.

B. Western Viewpoint

One major fault of the documentary theory is its whole mode of thinking. Here are modern European scholars analyzing a book written thousands of years earlier by Near Eastern writers. In a lecture given by Kenneth A. Kitchen in 1965, he remarked: "Failure to allow for the non-European, non-modern origin of the OT text was a cardinal error of the 1st magnitude, fatally repeated by practically all his (i.e., Astruc) successors."

C. Literary Criteria

Much could be said concerning the matter of literary criteria, though space does not permit a full evaluation in these notes. The following points are representative of the weaknesses:

1. Multiple Terms for Deity

The claim has been made that there are two distinct accounts of creation provided in Gen 1–2, and that these come from different authors whose accounts were subsequently merged. The supposed evidence for this is that the first account (1:1–2:3) uses the name "Elohim" while the second (2:4ff.) uses the name "YHWH." However, it is equally as valid to say that this could be the work of one author who wished to provide complementary accounts of creation, intending to emphasize different aspects in each account. The first reveals the whole of creation as climaxed by man, while the second serves to show the unique environment and setting for the fall of man.

Another example might be the revelation of the divine name YHWH in Ex 3:13-16 and Ex 6:2-3. The first is attributed to E and the second to P. Ex 6:2-3 reads, "*I am the LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD (YHWH), I did not make Myself known to them.*" However, does the latter case in Ex 6 really mean to

⁵Harrison, 22.

say that the name itself (YHWH) was not previously known? A better explanation is that in Ex 6, God is saying that in the character expressed by His name YHWH, He was not known. Hence, there is no real need to see a conflict between the passages, as though they came from independent hands.

I would also point out that the divine names are not just meaningless labels, but stress different qualities about God. They are used purposely, depending on the context in which they are found. Why should the JEDP theory not allow for variation for literary purposes, when all other literature in the Near East did?

The most obvious objection is the inconsistency with which the divine names are found within the "sources." For instance, YHWH appears within the E source (Gen 15:1,2,7,8; 20:18; 22:11,14; 28:17-22) as well as in the P source (Gen 7:16b; 17:1; 21:16). Elohim appears in the J source (Gen 2-3; 3:1-5; 4:25; 7:9; 9:27; 16:13; 31:50; 32:9,28-29).

2. Vocabulary

The purpose of words can easily vary with the context. Hence, to think that certain words are distinctive to a given document is a weak proposition. Neither are synonyms absolute, but often are varied purposefully.

3. Style

In dealing with the differences in style, it should be pointed out that a change in style does not necessarily indicate a change of author, for it may just as well indicate a change in subject matter.

4. Doublets

Alleged duplicate narratives of the same event, separately recorded, have been used as a claim for different sources. However, this claim does not logically follow, since the accounts may be there for a purpose (e.g., the names Jacob/Israel in Gen 32:28 and 35:10).

V. EFFECT ON INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY

As mentioned at the first of this paper, Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch has been totally abandoned by scholars who embrace this theory. However, more than authorship is at stake. The presuppositions and conclusions strike at the very heart of a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. G. Herbert Livingston lists several of the consequences of this theory that provide an affront to inspiration:⁶

- 1) Mosaic authorship is rejected, with only bits of the Pentateuch attributed to the Mosaic period;
- 2) For many of the scholars who accept Wellhausen's view, the men and women of the Pentateuch were not actual human beings—at best they were idealized heroes;
- 3) The Pentateuch does not give us a true history of ancient times, but it reflects instead the history of the divided kingdom through the early part of the postexilic period;

⁶G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment*, 229.

- 4) None of the people in the Pentateuch were monotheistic, and it was the postexilic priests who made them look like believers in one God;
- 5) God never spoke to any individuals in ancient times, but again, it was the work of the priests that gives that impression;
- 6) Very few of the laws in the Pentateuch were pre-kingdom in origin;
- 7) Very few of the cultic practices recorded in the Pentateuch were pre-kingdom, and many were postexilic;
- 8) The early Israelites never had a tabernacle such as described in Exodus;
- 9) All claims in the Pentateuch that God acted redemptively and miraculously on behalf of Israel are erroneous.

This is not to say that all scholars who embrace this theory concur with all these conclusions. These are *general* affirmations.

A modern-day example could be found in the popular critic, Gerhard von Rad. After stating quite conclusively that Deuteronomy arose from the time of Josiah, and was the work of certain Levites and priests who were concerned to make the old cultic and legal traditions relevant for their time, he asserts:

The sermons in Deuteronomy are addressed to Israel in the form of words of Moses, now near to his death, when they arrived in the land of Moab This fiction is maintained consistently throughout the whole of Deuteronomy. But it really is a fiction. In fact, these sermons are addressed to the Israel of the later period of the monarchy.⁷

If the Bible is that kind of a book (intentionally misleading), how could we believe anything it said? Our eternal destiny depends on a Bible that represents absolute truth! Where is a word from God for men in darkness?

VI. MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP AND COMPOSITION

That Moses is the author of the main part of the Pentateuch receives support both from the testimony of Scripture itself as well as the internal evidence of the books.⁸

A. The Witness of the Scriptures

1. From the Pentateuch

In Deut 31:9, we read, "*And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests.*" Other testimony comes from Ex 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Num 33:1-2; Josh 8:31-32; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6; 21:8; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1; Dan 9:11-13; and Mal 4:4.

⁷Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, 23.

⁸For a presentation of arguments against Mosaic authorship from a critical scholar, see J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 80-83.

2. From the New Testament

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself affirmed Mosaic authorship when He said in John 5:46-47, "*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*" Other support can be found in Matt 19:8; Jn 7:19; Acts 3:22; Rom 10:5; and Mk 12:26.

B. Internal Evidence

1. Eyewitness details are provided such as Ex 15:27 in which the narrator recalls the exact number of fountains and palm trees (cf. Num 11:7-8).
2. The author of Genesis and Exodus shows a thorough acquaintance with Egypt, such as his familiarity with Egyptian names (e.g., "On" as the native name for Heliopolis). Furthermore, he uses a greater percentage of Egyptian words than elsewhere in the OT. His familiarity with court life and customs reveals a background in the Egyptian culture.
3. The author reveals a foreign viewpoint as far as the land of Canaan is concerned. For example, the seasons and the weather referred to in the narrative are Egyptian, not Palestinian. References to trees, animals, and skins are quite often those foreign to Palestine. Geographical references reveal the author's great familiarity with Egypt and Sinai.
4. Within the books of Exodus and Numbers, the atmosphere of desert life is unmistakable (which would be quite unlikely if these books were written nearly 1000 years later as suggested by Wellhausen). The layout of the camp would be of no concern to a people long settled in the land. Other details like the exact order of march and provision for sanitary instructions reflect documents that are authentically geared for desert life.

For a more thorough discussion and defense of Mosaic authorship, the student is referred to Gleason Archer's *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1964, 1974, 1994, 2007).

VII. CONCLUSION

The JEDP theory represents an attempt by liberal scholarship to undermine the authority of the Word of God, though attempting to appear scientific. To investigate and analyze the Scriptures is not wrong, but to go against the plain, normal meaning of the Word by embracing a theory that is at best conjectural, is to rebel against the very Word from God that was given so that man would not have to remain in darkness.

The truth is we have a Bible today that is fully trustworthy as the inspired Word of God, and sufficient for all we need to know in order to know God and walk in His ways as we await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ to conclude this age and establish His kingdom on earth.