
A table of contents for *Theological Students Fellowship* (TSF) *Bulletin* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tsfbulletin_01.php

in predicting fulfilment within the lifetime of some of His hearers Jesus was mistaken. 'The convictions . . . were true,' he says, 'the perspective mistaken.' He thinks any historical error here can be covered by our Lord's explicit profession of ignorance on this very point, — that He did not know the day nor the hour. On such a point, Dr. Beasley-Murray would be wiser to confess his own ignorance than to allow his supposed understanding to convict Jesus of mistake.

The present writer is certainly thus aware that he does not know enough to give a full and final interpretation. He can only suggest a way of understanding that has brought him some help. In the first place Christ was obviously talking about things which were to happen in the lifetime of his hearers. These things were, too, very contrary to their Jewish expectations. For Christ said that they would be violently opposed by their fellow-Jews, beaten in the synagogues, brought before political authorities, betrayed by close relatives. Also, the gospel was to be preached to the Gentile nations. Finally Jerusalem and the Temple were to be destroyed. And all these things happened in that generation, by A.D 70.

Now notice that, while in verses 14 to 23 Jesus speaks directly to His disciples about things to happen in their lifetime — He says 'when *ye* shall see' (14), 'pray *ye*' (18), 'take *ye* heed' (23) — in verses 24 to 27 He speaks differently, in vague terms — 'in *those* days' (24) — of events to happen 'after that tribulation'; and He says, 'Then shall *they*' (not ye) 'see the Son of man coming' (26), implying that His hearers would no longer be alive.

Then, in conclusion, our Lord sums up by referring again, first (verses 28-30) to the more immediate prospect of the destruction of Jerusalem, etc., and then (verses 31-37) to the ultimate consummation of the passing away of heaven and earth and the coming of the Son of man. About the first He says, 'when *ye* shall see *these* things coming to pass, know ye that it is nigh'; for 'all *these* things' are to be accomplished before the present generation has passed away; and they ought unmistakably to know when it is near from detailed indications so plainly given. Then, in contrast to '*these* things', and to the fact that their consummation will be so self-evident, He says, 'But of *that* day', i.e. of the final events, no man can know the time. Therefore, it behoves all Christians of every generation to watch and be ready; for none knows when the time is. The Master's one word to all is, Watch.

ALAN M. STIBBS.

SOME LITERATURE ON THE PENTATEUCH

In many text-books, especially those of vintage years or elementary character, the impression is given that the theory of the Pentateuch associated with the name of Wellhausen and often expressed under the formula JEPD(+H) is as the law of the Medes and Persians which altereth not. The aim of this article is to show that this is no longer so; to indicate some of the ways in which scholars (mostly non-conservative) have reacted against it; and to indicate the sources to which the evangelical student may look for a criticism of positions which may be presented as unassailable fact, judging thereby whether the processes by which these positions are reached are necessarily as scientific and objective as is sometimes claimed. It will therefore be necessary largely to indicate references in the hope that those interested may follow them up. This can be most rewarding.

In 1945 Prof. Edward Robertson, who has put forward his own theory of the origin of the Pentateuch, wrote: 'It is no secret that the Graf-Wellhausen theory of the origin and history of the Old Testament Scriptures, and particularly the Pentateuch, has an uneasy acceptance by Old Testament scholars . . . it is unconvincing in itself and the atmosphere it engenders is one of unreality . . . the theory has been shot at from all angles and perforated at all points, but yet it survives and most Old Testament scholars continue to adjust their views and fashion their arrangements within its framework in general alignment with its contentions.'

But many who do accept the hypothesis utter caveats no less impressive.

Thus Prof. T. H. Robinson, a veteran scholar of the old régime, says: 'There can be no finality to literary criticism . . . even a hypothesis so widely accepted as the Graf-Wellhausen view of the Hexateuch must be subjected to re-examination by every serious student of the subject' (*Journal Bib. Lit.* lxix., 1950, p. 181f.); and Prof. H. H. Rowley has declared 'It has become the fashion to decry the Wellhausen hypothesis of Pentateuchal criticism, and every writer who would secure a hearing must announce himself as a fresh claimant to the throne of Wellhausen, which he declares to be vacant.' Characteristically he adds: 'A really satisfactory alternative to the Wellhausen hypothesis would be readily welcomed by a large number of students: but to be satisfactory it must satisfy and not merely be different' (*JTS* (NS) i, 1950, p. 195).

This is a very different tone from the 'It may be regarded as proven that . . .' and, even worse, 'No intelligent person can doubt that . . .' of some earlier works. Our purpose now is to note some of the directions from which the 'orthodox-critical' hypothesis has, in Prof. Robertson's words, been 'shot at and perforated'.

We begin with Prof. Robertson's own work: a fascinating series of articles in the *John Rylands Bulletin* conveniently collected in his volume *The Old Testament Problem* (Manchester U.P. 1950). Robertson does not deny the presence of documents: but, he says, a Pentateuch collected in the patchwork fashion represented by the standard hypothesis could never have gained acceptance in Israel. 'Its whole background implies, and its exponents also imply, that behind the composition of the Pentateuch there has been an extended and intricate process of literary drafting and editorship. In our search for the documents we are introduced . . . to a literary world in which we meet with a variety of authors and compilers. Copyists in their weak moments make errors in the text. Redactors rectify and manipulate. Glossators annotate in the margins. . . . But all this, or at least very much of it, is a reflex of the age of the printing press. . . . Is it conceivable that a religious community even in the present day could adopt as their Sacred Scriptures documents which they are left to select in the haphazard way implied?' (*op. cit.* p. 35). The Torah was, from the earliest times, the very core of Israel's religion: far from being unknown to the eighth century prophets, they are constantly reminding Israel of its existence (cf. Hosea iv. 6, viii. 12; Amos ii. 4).

Robertson stresses the value of the component documents: 'The genealogical list is the backbone of early Hebrew historical records and traditions. And he gives an interpretation of the Old Testament quite different from the usual one.

Much of the legislation, he says, comes, at least in germ, from Moses. At the conquest there would be, in the different tribal zones, zonal sanctuaries, marked by previous theophanies, all worshipping Jehovah with the same basic ritual and germinal law, all giving rise to a developing corpus of teaching, all with distinctive local features. Samuel is the unifier of the country. Under his guidance the zonal law codes were united and a revised and inspired summary drawn up by a committee of prophets with Samuel as Chairman. Thus 'the different writers, or rather compilers, of the Torah all lived in the same age and were all occupied with their great tasks at the same time'.

We need not continue with Robertson's account of Old Testament history. As a solution to the Old Testament problem it is not satisfactory: and there are highly speculative elements in it. But his book is refreshing and a stimulating one, and its critique of the 'orthodox-critical' position appears devastating: the more so as it comes from a non-conservative scholar.

A pupil of Robertson, Dr. Rudolph Brinker, has developed the thesis in *The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel* (Manchester U.P. 1946). It is perhaps significant that the preface reflects a pilgrimage from the religious implications of Wellhausen to a surer faith and a better mind.

Another assault upon the whole structure of Pentateuchal theory comes from the active and prolific group of Scandinavian writers, led by Ivan Engnell, whose comprehensive study *Gamla Testamentet* is gradually appearing. The school has been strongly influenced by non-Scandinavian scholars, such as

Gunkel, and by the psychological approach of Pedersen, whose great volumes *Israel* (Copenhagen and London, 2nd ed. 1946) often make welcome reading after the aridity of most text-books on 'Hebrew Religion'.

A convenient summary of the views of the 'Uppsala school', as it is now being called, has recently been published in England: *Oral Tradition* by E. Nielsen (S.C.M. 1954). The whole documentary theory is 'nothing but a Western anachronism' (Engnell's phrase). Argument from obscurities, doublets, variants and so on (the sort of argument in text-books like Simpson's *Pentateuchal Criticism*) is invalid when dealing with ancient and oriental material: the most that can be done is to separate large complexes of material of similar type, and then undertake the precarious task of dividing the complex into approximate 'traditio-historical' units. Indeed, G. Widengren (*Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets*, Uppsala 1948) declares, on the basis of comparison with other Semitic modes of thought and composition, that the criteria usually urged to demonstrate diversity of authorship — autobiographical passages, repetitions, prosaic additions, variant, even contradictory, matter — may go back to the same author.

According to the school, the crux of the Wellhausen hypothesis — the placing of the prophets before the Law — was a gigantic error, committed through not distinguishing the date of origin of documentary sources from their literary fixation. The facts which are stressed by the Uppsala scholars are the antiquity of Law and the vastly superior reliability of oral tradition in the ancient Orient as compared with modern days. The school does not present a united front, Widengren giving much more place to writing in early times than the others: and they are able to accept more or less of current literary criticism as desired. But, as Widengren notes (*op. cit.* p. 123), the usual *methods* of literary critics are fundamentally called in question.

Another comparatively new, and very active and learned, group of writers is that associated with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Their works, written for the most part in modern Hebrew, are difficult of access, but, like the other movements described, they seem to be reacting in a more conservative direction against both the literary and religious implications of the generally accepted hypothesis. An account of a recent important contribution by Y. Kaufmann, one of their leading exponents, is given by D. Cohen in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* x, Sept. 1953, p. 186ff.

So far these notes have touched only on works which offer a fundamentally different account of the origin of the Pentateuch from the standard one. But even among those who accept it in broad outline it is apparent that some pillars which hold up the edifice are very insecure.

The document E has had a particularly hard time. Volz and Rudolph, in a joint work *Der Elohist als Erzähler ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik?* (Berlin 1933), and later in Rudolph's *Der 'Elohist' von Exodus bis Josua* (Berlin 1938), were convinced that the criteria showed no independent existence for E at all. More recently F. V. Winnett, in *The Mosaic Tradition* (Toronto and O.U.P. 1949), denies its existence outside Genesis. Prof. T. H. Robinson, in the review quoted earlier, points to a difficulty which many have felt in the Wellhausen hypothesis: J is always regarded as a southern document, E as a northern, and D as composed in Jerusalem: how is it, then, that the affinities of D are with E, rather than with the document of the same assumed provenance as itself? The status of J and E as *documents* has in any case long been in doubt, in view of, among other things, the presence of units (an aspect stressed by Winnett) which show an apparently deliberate grouping of material which cuts clean across the division into sources.

The vast increase of archaeological knowledge since Wellhausen's time is a commonplace; and it is widely agreed that the general effect of this is to show that things for which a late date was once demanded actually reflect an early period. This is usually reconciled with the documentary theory by saying that early material had been incorporated into a late period: but, as more and more material is evacuated from the later period, one is tempted to wonder how much longer it will be necessary to regard the containing document as late. The literature on this subject is immense, but a convenient

guide with a very full bibliography is given in W. F. Albright's pamphlet *The Biblical Period* (Blackwell 1952; see also the review by D. J. Wiseman in the last T.S.F. Letter).

Archaeological work has also done much to revise the ideas of the early religion of Israel to which the standard hypothesis of the Pentateuch is so closely wedded. Much of the evolutionist sediment characteristic of the age of Wellhausen has been dredged away: leaving abandoned, for instance, the first section of Oesterley and Robinson's *Hebrew Religion*. What are there taken as animist traces paralleled in the Old Testament are now regarded as Stone Age survivals from a period long before biblical times. On this question see the useful *The Old Testament Against its Environment* by G. E. Wright (S.C.M. 1950).

While for many the distinctions between documents have been blurred, for others new ones have been discovered by the same criteria as established the original four: 2 J's (Smend), 2 P's (von Rad), an S (Pfeiffer), and so on. This process, too, tends to undermine confidence in the general structure. Perhaps it is not without interest also, in view of the great part which Ezekiel has played in determining the order of the documents, that the great, if eccentric, scholar C. C. Torrey sought to substantiate his very late dating for the book of Ezekiel by declaring 'The plain fact, as one day will be generally recognised, is that the author of the book had the completed Pentateuch before him, in the very form in which it lies before us at the present day' (*Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy*, Yale 1930, p. 91).

No mention in this survey has been made of works specifically on Deuteronomy, the linchpin of the whole theory. It is here that modern work has been most significant, and to the standard hypothesis, most damaging: but, if desired, it is hoped that this may be dealt with in a subsequent — and briefer — article.

Nor has work by conservative scholars been dealt with. Most members will be — or ought to be — acquainted with E. J. Young's *Introduction to the Old Testament* and G. Ch. Aaldeis' *Short Introduction to the Pentateuch* (both Tyndale Press). One older work ought to be mentioned: the masterly *Problem of the Old Testament* by James Orr (London 1906), which has recently been receiving commendation in surprising places.

A. F. WALLS.

BOOK REVIEWS

ORAL TRADITION. By Eduard Nielsen. S.C.M. Press, 1954. 7s.

The late Dr. S. A. Cook, one time Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, said in his book *The Old Testament, a Reinterpretation*, published in 1936, that 'since the current literary hypothesis (as laid down by Wellhausen, Kuenen, Robertson Smith, etc.) involves the whole of the Old Testament, any new one that is framed to replace it must not be less comprehensive' (p. 48). The group of Scandinavian scholars, led by H. S. Nyberg, H. Birkeland and Ivan Engnell, is concerned to demonstrate that the older 'literary-critical' approach is defective and anachronistic, whereas the new 'tradition-historical' method of interpretation of which they are the exponents both solves more problems and is more in keeping with the actual circumstances of scriptural origins and transmission.

Thus the challenge thrown down by Dr. Cook was in fact being taken up almost simultaneously, for it was in 1935 that H. S. Nyberg's epoch-making *Studien zum Hoseabuch* appeared in the *Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift* (Yearbook), in which he broached the whole question of oral tradition, its extent, significance and reliability. Three years later, H. Birkeland stressed the fact that Old Testament literature is a product of ancient oriental culture in which the spoken word is always primary, and that therefore the literary categories with which Old Testament scholars had worked so long were not really applicable. This conclusion has been described by the Dutch scholar Van der Ploeg as '*un peu approfondi*', and by C. R. North as being 'like the cake of barley-bread which tumbled into the camp of the Midianites', but at least it showed that an entirely new effort was being made to assess