

CRITIQUE OF HIGHER CRITICISM

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In the late nineteenth century, the Presbyterian Church of the United States charged Rev. Charles A. Briggs with heresy for saying errors exist in the original biblical manuscripts. They accused him of alluding to sources and calling for the use of higher criticism. In the end, his statements led to his conviction as a heretic.¹ This story illustrates the fear that many Christians exhibit toward higher criticism. Is this fear justified or are conservative scholars merely paranoid? An examination of the history and background of higher criticism reveals that the fear is warranted. This conclusion will be show by examining the definition of higher criticism, its historical background, and the results of higher critical methodology will prove this conclusion.

Definition of Higher Criticism

Higher criticism is a historical approach to scripture² that investigates the “composition, date, and authenticity” of scripture³ in order to determine its “place in history.”⁴ In other words, higher criticism looks beyond the text and into the historical

¹John J. McCook, comp., *The Appeal in the Briggs Heresy Case* (New York: John C. Rankin Co, 1893), 60-61.

²Willis B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954), 227.

³J. Mercier McMullen, *The Supremacy of the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), 345-46.

⁴Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 1.

setting surrounding its construction and development. This endeavor requires the critic to accept a presupposition of doubt, meaning he must acknowledge uncertainty exists regarding the precise origins of the present-day biblical text.

Higher criticism primarily focuses on source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Source criticism questions traditional authorship, so it attempts to determine the original sources. Form criticism assumes that style and cultural forms influenced the writing of the text, so it attempts to determine the original forms. Redaction criticism believes the present day documents are merely edited versions, so it attempts to determine the specific revisions or edits to the text. These three criticisms contrast with lower criticism, which deals strictly with the text without denying biblical veracity.⁵ Of these three, the latter two depend on the existence of sources, making source criticism the pivotal method of higher criticism.

Higher critical methodology investigates the Bible's integrity, authenticity, literary form, and credibility. Integrity involves determining if the text comes from one or multiple authors, is a collection or a single work, and whether the original content underwent interpolation. Authenticity deals with whether the author's identity is anonymous or he used a pseudonym. Literary form deals with determining whether the text is poetry, prose, narrative, or other literary forms. It also examines the author's writing style. Credibility deals with the reliability of the text and asks if the "statements accord with the truth."⁶

⁵Craig V. Mitchell, *Charts of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 60.

⁶Charles Augustus Briggs, *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 2-3.

The most prominent theory within source criticism is the Graf-Wellhausen documentary hypothesis. This hypothesis concludes that the Pentateuch derived from five sources: Yahwehist (J, referring to the German transliteration, Jehovah), Elohist (E, referring to the Hebrew word for God, Elohim), Deuteronomical (D, written during the time of Josiah and almost exclusively found in Deuteronomy), Priestly writings (P, post exilic writings), and the Holiness code (H, origin is unknown). Originally, Graf and Wellhausen proposed only JEDP,⁷ with later critics adding H to the list.⁸

Historical Background of Higher Criticism

Higher criticism finds its roots during the reformation when Andreas Carlstadt, counterpart and friend of Martin Luther, expressed doubts regarding Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Thomas Hobbes continued this speculation through the seventeenth century. Not long after, Baruch Spinoza picked up on this speculation and developed the early stages of formal higher criticism during the late 1600s.⁹

Many historians consider Spinoza, an excommunicated Jew, the root of prevailing critical theories.¹⁰ Born in the Holland in 1632, Spinoza adopted a form of atheism¹¹ that led to modern pantheism.¹² An avid rationalistic philosophical writer, the government of Holland deemed many of his works as “dangerous to society and to

⁷Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 6.

⁸Horace M. Du Bose, ed., *The Aftermath Series* (Nashville: Lamar and Burton, 1923), 25.

⁹Briggs, *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*, 36-39.

¹⁰Randolph H. McKim, *The Problem of the Pentateuch* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1906), 39-40.

¹¹McMullen, *The Supremacy of the Bible*, 348.

¹²McKim, *The Problem of the Pentateuch*, 39-40.

religion.”¹³ Spinoza believed that the many divergent interpretations of scripture caused all wars.¹⁴ In his work, *Political Theological Treatise*, he states that man lives free when he is able think independently of government or ecumenical pressures. He bases this on the idea that everyone has “a perfect right and authority to judge freely about religion.”¹⁵ Furthermore, he states that man becomes oppressed when he surrenders his natural freedom to religion¹⁶ and allows the political or religious leaders to control how individuals think.¹⁷ In order to resolve this problem and end all wars, two changes must take place. First, individuals must submit themselves to their own minds because religion “disturb[s] public peace and quiet”;¹⁸ second, man must “investigate the origin” of the Bible¹⁹ by employing a scientific approach.²⁰

Spinoza proposed various problems with four aspects of the Pentateuch: unsubstantiated historical references (Gen 14:14; Ex 16:35; Deut 1:1; etc.), inconsistencies within the text (Ex 4:20; 18:2), implications of non-Mosaic authorship (Num 21:14; Deut 27:2), and lauding over Moses (Num 12:3).²¹ Therefore, he employed

¹³McMullen, *The Supremacy of the Bible*, 348.

¹⁴Mitchell, *Charts of Christian Ethics*, 60.

¹⁵Benedict de Spinoza, *The Political Works: The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus in Part and the Tractatus Politicus in Full*, trans. A. G. Wernham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 108.

¹⁶Ibid., 143.

¹⁷Ibid., 227-29.

¹⁸Benedict de Spinoza, *Writings on Political Philosophy*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc, 1937), 101.

¹⁹C. W. Rishell, *The Higher Criticism: An Outline of Modern Biblical Study*, 2 ed. (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1896), 47.

²⁰Du Bose, *The Aftermath Series*, 3.

²¹Briggs, *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*, 36-39.

an empirical methodology to explain these problem texts. As a result, Spinoza concluded that redactors composed the present-day Pentateuch many years after the death of Moses. Furthermore, that any document Moses may have composed was completely different from the current edition.²²

Following Spinoza's example, Thomas Paine and Jean Astruc continued promoting speculation and higher critical methodology. Paine, one of the United States' founding fathers and author of *The Age of Reason*, first proposed that Deuteronomy was penned during the reign of King Josiah.²³ Despite his label as the "Sir Isaac Newton of criticism,"²⁴ Astruc, a French Roman Catholic physician,²⁵ was never known for his theological ability nor trained in Biblical criticism.²⁶ Building on the work of Spinoza, Astruc gave birth to the documentary hypothesis by proposing in his work, *Conjectures Concerning the Original Memoranda*,²⁷ the idea that Genesis was composed of two sources based on the names of God: Yahweh (J) and Elohim (E).²⁸ J. G. Eichhorn expanded on Astruc's work and proposed more sources, concluding that redactors developed the modern versions of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and the last chapters of Deuteronomy. J. G. Gabler, father of biblical theology, deemed the analysis of Astruc

²²Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), 120.

²³McKim, *The Problem of the Pentateuch*, 40.

²⁴John L. Campbell, *The Bible Under Fire* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 6.

²⁵Briggs, *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*, 46.

²⁶Du Bose, *The Aftermath Series*, 22.

²⁷Campbell, *The Bible Under Fire*, 7-8.

²⁸Briggs, *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*, 46.

and Eichhorn as so well done, and the proof of sources so evident, that “it can be regarded as settled and presupposed without fear of any important opposition.”²⁹ After examining their work of these men, De Wette, professor of theology at Heideberg University, concluded that the Pentateuch contains mere legend and poetry.³⁰

In the late nineteenth century, German theologian Julius Wellhausen adopted the teachings of both Abraham Keunen, who rejected divine authorship, and Austruc. Believing that Yahweh was errant and paranoid, and that the Old Testament contained mostly lavish legend that is “wholly unworthy of credit,” he developed the documentary hypothesis.³¹ After his investigation into the various proposed sources of the Pentateuch, Wellhausen concluded that the original people-group recorded in scripture was nothing more than a small Bedouin tribe with cultic gods; these groups were no different than any other ancient Middle Eastern wandering people-group. Consequently, Wellhausen eliminated the Christian God or a divine author.³²

Consequences and Dangers of Higher Criticism

Higher criticism carries various weaknesses and dangers that fall into four categories: presuppositions, methodology, archeology, and results. Proper scholarship requires acknowledging these problems rather than ignoring them. Failure to acknowledge these problems causes higher criticism to become a theology rather than a

²⁹Ibid., 50-53.

³⁰McMullen, *The Supremacy of the Bible*, 350-51.

³¹Ibid., 352-361.

³²Du Bose, *The Aftermath Series*, 243-44.

scientific study. Therefore, in order to ensure academic viability, higher criticism will here be critiqued within the four categories mentioned above.

Presuppositional Problems

The presupposition of doubt outlined above contains underlying difficulties, especially when one considers the presuppositions of Wellhausen and Spinoza. These two critical fathers approached scripture with four key presuppositions:

1. Scripture must submit itself to human reason³³ and “contemporary methods of study and modes of thought;”³⁴
2. Denying scripture’s absolute veracity,³⁵ historicity,³⁶ inspiration, reliability, and authority;³⁷
3. Scripture is highly corrupt;³⁸ and
4. Humans are the only authors of scripture.³⁹

This concept reduces scripture to equal status as the works of Homer, William Shakespeare, and Mark Twain, and elevates human reason to a form of deity. Christians

³³Howard Osgood and George S. Bishop, *Anti-Higher Criticism*, ed. L. W. Munhall (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1894), 16.

³⁴S. R. Driver and A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Higher Criticism* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 17. Driver helped develop the widely used Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew lexicon, referred to as “BDB”. Driver and Briggs both widely promoted higher critical methodology.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 20-21.

³⁶William B. Riley, *The Finality of Higher Criticism* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 14-15.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 119.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹Arthur Phillips, *The Failure of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament* (London: John Bale, Sons, and Danielson, 1923), 22-23.

cannot rightfully acknowledge scripture as the final authority that is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16b-17, NASB⁴⁰) when they place human reason above scripture. The primary setback for this reversal of authority is that man’s wisdom, knowledge, and thoughts are corrupted by sin and, therefore, prone to error. John Calvin outlines as much when he describes man as possessing a “hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature.”⁴¹ However, the error of the presuppositions is found in not only the demotion of scripture and the promotion of man, but also in the mindset of the fathers of higher criticism.

Spinoza, Austruc, and Wellhausen, the developers of higher criticism in general and source criticism specifically, typify the modern era of philosophical thought, a period ranging from 1600 to 1950. Philosophers of this era operated with a hermeneutic of doubt, meaning they denied the truthfulness of scripture, requiring proof before accepting its veracity. Furthermore, modern-era thinkers sought Cartesian Certainty, which is “absolute authority of knowledge... achieved via methodological doubt, which rejects any knowledge of which one is not certain.”⁴² In addition, modern thinkers reject the supernatural because it cannot be proven with absolute certainty. It is this mindset—reject God and doubt the truthfulness of scripture—in which higher

⁴⁰Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org).

⁴¹John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), 157 [on-line]; accessed 12 September 2006; available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.pdf?url=/ccel/calvin/institutes.pdf>; Internet.

⁴²Mitchell, *Charts of Christian Ethics*, 26, 60.

criticism is rooted. Such roots must cause conservative Christian scholars to question the validity of higher criticism.

One need examine not only the philosophical soil from which higher criticism grew, but also the history of the founding individuals to find reason to deem it untenable. Spinoza claimed that his higher critical methods remove all presuppositions;⁴³ higher critics in general deny any “reliance upon assumptions.”⁴⁴ Nonetheless, no critic or student of scripture approaches the Bible free of presuppositions. Furthermore, some tasks depend upon certain preconceived ideas or beliefs. For example, in order to date a document accurately one must possess other similar documents from the same era in order to compare the two. However, since little to no documents similar to the JEDP sources are absolutely known to exist from the dates critics claim, there is no basis of comparison. Therefore, the critic must assume a date based on speculation and held beliefs, which are, by definition, the presuppositions of the critic.

The beliefs and purposes of the early critical fathers betray their objectivity and arouse suspicion regarding their motives. Wellhausen intimated he desired to pick apart scripture rather than understand it.⁴⁵ Furthermore, his disdain of the Roman Catholic Church and their priesthood tainted his view of the so-called P source. Wellhausen rejected P documents because he believed they were written by priests whom he called “senile,” “unimaginative,” “dogmatic,” “opinionated,” “rude,” “crude,”

⁴³Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defense of Infallibilism in 19th Century Britain* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 16.

⁴⁴Phillips, *The Failure of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament*, 22.

⁴⁵Douglas A. Knight, “Wellhausen and the Interpretation of Israel’s Literature,” *Semeia* 25 (1983): 21.

“mechanical,” “ascetic,” “cancerous,” and “parasitic.”⁴⁶ As stated earlier, Spinoza approached scripture not as a student, but as an atheist seeking to make scripture vague in order to end wars. Gabler, who praised the work of Austruc and Eichhorn as “settled and presupposed without fear of any important opposition,”⁴⁷ is no less biased. In fact, his statement is tantamount to saying one should blindly accept the authority of higher criticism no matter what the evidence proves. Samuel Driver would agree with Gabler, claiming that even if Moses is proven the author of Genesis through Numbers, he cannot be proven the author of Deuteronomy. He bases this on his personal speculation rather than solid evidence.⁴⁸ Such statements abandon scholarship and enter the world of theology and faith. When one blindly accepts something as true, even when proven false, such a belief is based on blind faith rather than scientific evidence. Therefore, since the founding fathers of higher criticism approached scripture with an antagonistic bias, desiring not to understand the teachings of scripture but, instead, to dissect it in order to disprove it, one must remain skeptical as to the soundness of higher critical methodology.

When one correctly analyzes scripture, one concludes that it is truthful, trustworthy, and free of corruption. Scriptural veracity is seen in that the Bible foresees many things only discovered thousands of years after its writing. For example, modern sanitary and hygienic teachings are predicted in the ceremonial laws. In addition, astronomical facts such as the round earth are predicted in scripture.⁴⁹ Scripture’s

⁴⁶Roland Boer, “Julius Wellhausen and His Prolegomena to the History of Israel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (Summer 2005): 351-51.

⁴⁷Briggs, *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*, 52-53.

⁴⁸McMullen, *The Supremacy of the Bible*, 393.

⁴⁹A. McCaig, *The Grand Old Book* (London: Elliott Stock, 1894), 244-45.

supposed contradictions are easily explained when one considers that they may be due to rounding, translational errors, cultural idioms, or other explanations. Therefore, the problem derives from man's misunderstanding or mistranslating scripture rather than Biblical error. Furthermore, some doubt Mosaic authorship because Moses is referred to in the third person. However, Wray notes that ancient historians often referenced themselves in third person to obscure their identity.⁵⁰

Methodological Errors

The presuppositions of higher criticism alone do not evidence its untrustworthiness; its methodology also contributes. Higher criticism attempts to apply the scientific method to determine the compositional history of scripture. As mentioned before, the goal of science is to obtain the truth with Cartesian, or absolute, certainty. However, the scientific method prevents attaining this objective because it is an “empirical, inductive approach to knowledge.”⁵¹ Empirical knowledge is knowledge based primarily on sensory experience while induction involves probabilities rather than certainty. Science uses mathematical probabilities to determine how often a set of results is obtained under specific conditions. However, since probability is the foundational basis of the scientific method, one cannot achieve absolute certainty using this method.

Following the scientific method, the best evidence for determining scripture's origins is contemporary eyewitness accounts. However, no eyewitnesses remain alive, necessarily increasing the chances of inaccuracy. Scientific methodology requires that

⁵⁰Newton Wray, *Must the Bible Go?* (Chicago: Christian Witness Co, 1916), 31.

⁵¹Mitchell, *Charts of Christian Ethics*, 17.

hypothesis be testable and, since the eyewitnesses died millennia ago, the hypotheses of higher critics are not truly testable.⁵² As a result, it is more likely that the conclusions of higher critics will be inaccurate.

Despite the evidence against it, higher criticism maintains its scientific authenticity. Spinoza attempted to apply scientific methods to scripture when he developed his “inquisitional principle” which taught that the critic is judge, jury, and executioner. He possesses the right to decide the rules and standards of his criticism.⁵³ Furthermore, according to higher critical methodology, the “only universal standard of methodology is subjectivity; each critic can divide and subdivide based on tastes.”⁵⁴ Such arbitrary standards are evidenced by the conclusions drawn by higher critics. For example, their claim that scripture’s visible written form is completely human is based on mere assumption. No testable evidence is provided. For example, critics claim that the creation story recorded in Genesis originated from the Babylonian story. However, no evidence is provided except the speculations of the critics. Close analysis proves that there are enough differences between the two accounts that the Babylonian story would require nearly a complete rewrite, not simple adaptation, to create the Genesis account.⁵⁵

Another example of arbitrary, untestable conclusions is how source critics deal with the Egyptian plagues in Exodus. Close analysis reveals that no two scholars agree as to the JEP designations because there is no standardized system of determining

⁵²Phillips, *The Failure of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament*, 75.

⁵³Emil Reich, *The Failure of the ‘Higher Criticism’ of the Bible* (London: James Nisbet and Co, 1905), 84-100.

⁵⁴Osgood and Bishop, *Anti-Higher Criticism*, 39.

⁵⁵Phillips, *The Failure of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament*, 22-29.

sources. Rather than employing a universal method, critics arbitrarily designate each section according to their own speculation.⁵⁶

Wellhausen virtually admitted the arbitrariness of higher criticism when he confessed that his criticism allied to the Masoretic text and not the Septuagint. The Septuagint predates the Masoretic texts and each differs in “the exhibits of [the] groupings” of the names Yahweh and Elohim. Simply put, the two texts use the two names differently. Wellhausen admits this refutes the conclusions of the documentary hypothesis since it is based only on the Masoretic text.⁵⁷ Scholars must conclude that if the groupings differ, then the sources cannot be the same based on the use of the two names. Therefore, one must question the reliability of higher criticism due to its arbitrary, unscientific methods. Wenham fittingly describes the dangerous results of the arbitrary nature of higher criticism when he concludes that “every scholar [in higher criticism] will do what is right in his own eyes, and the world of Old Testament studies will disintegrate into factions denouncing each other for their alleged hidden agendas instead of attempting to refute the other side’s arguments.”⁵⁸

Along with these considerations, one may look beyond Wellhausen’s confession and the arbitrary methods of Spinoza to the credibility of Austruc. As the father of source criticism, upon whose concepts Wellhausen and others based their own, Austruc’s credibility and qualifications as a Biblical scholar are questionable. As mentioned before, Austruc worked as a physician and not a biblical scholar. His

⁵⁶Ibid., 102-104.

⁵⁷Du Bose, *The Aftermath Series*, 23-24.

⁵⁸Gordon J. Wenham, “Method in Pentateuchal Source Criticism,” *Vetus Testamentum* 41

contemporaries valued his abilities regarding medicine, but seriously questioned his abilities as a critical scholar due to a lack of training and experience.⁵⁹ Austruc admitted his own lack of evidence and credibility when he acknowledged that his JE hypothesis possessed no certainty, but mere personal speculation.⁶⁰ One cannot grant much credence to an inexperienced novice with little to no training in Biblical studies. Instead, scholars must follow the wisdom of Austruc's contemporaries in doubting his abilities and questioning his concepts. Furthermore, if Austruc's conclusions are questionable, then so are the conclusions of Eichhorn and Wellhausen, both of whom built upon his work.

It is these facts that cause Riley to conclude that higher criticism adopts "not the attitude of scientific investigation, but of skepticism."⁶¹ One must logically conclude that the fathers of higher criticism propagated speculation as fact and replaced the scientific method with arbitrary opinion. Scholars today must agree that higher critical methodology is questionable at best.

Archeological Evidence

Higher critics quickly turn to the discoveries of archeology and the humanities to support their unscientific conclusions. For example, they state that archeology and comparative religion prove that, based on similarities in language and phraseology, Israel's faith derived from other ancient Middle Eastern faiths.⁶² However, archeological

(January 1991): 84.

⁵⁹Du Bose, *The Aftermath Series*, 22.

⁶⁰Campbell, *The Bible Under Fire*, 7-8.

⁶¹Riley, *The Finality of Higher Criticism*, 30-31.

⁶²Driver and Kirkpatrick, *The Higher Criticism*, 26-27.

discoveries disprove this theory. Middle Eastern digs done in the mid twentieth century prove 1) that Hebrew life is not merely another Middle Eastern religion, 2) that monotheism did not develop in the Hebrew faith at a later date as higher critics claim, and 3) that the poetic texts originated many centuries before the sixth century date postulated by higher critics.⁶³

Riley agrees with Free when he concludes that archeological evidence supports a single Pentateuchal author and a Mosaic timeframe of compiling. This works against the claims of a post-Mosaic compilation claimed by higher critics. He goes on to say that archeology further proves the historicity of scripture.⁶⁴

One need not look far to discover that archeology, when rightly interpreted and understood, refutes the claims of higher criticism. Wellhausen admitted that archeology continues to disprove his conclusions, forcing him to alter them to conform to the new discoveries, even if the new conclusions contradict the old.⁶⁵ One must wonder whether higher critical methodology is truly scientific and reliable, why it is necessary to constantly update the conclusions, even if they cause conflict. The problem seems to be not with the text analyzed, but with the method of analysis. The difficulty lies not with scripture, but with higher critical methodology.

Dangerous Results

No study of scripture is devoid of consequences. However, the results of

⁶³Joseph P. Free, "Archeology and Biblical Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114 (January 1957): 26-27.

⁶⁴Riley, *The Finality of Higher Criticism*, 10-15.

⁶⁵McMullen, *The Supremacy of the Bible*, 389.

higher criticism pose a much greater risk than those of lower criticism. Before discussing the ultimate results of higher criticism, one must understand some of the conclusions that resulted in the catastrophic results.

First, regarding the specific sources described in the documentary hypothesis, Harold Bloom rejects all J material, deeming it blasphemous and contrary to doctrine. He also concludes that Yahweh is a fictional character created by the author of the J documents. Furthermore, Bloom rejects Biblical inspiration, despite Paul's assertion to the contrary (2 Tim 3:16).⁶⁶

Second, higher critics ultimately deduce that the Pentateuch is "practically a forgery."⁶⁷ Such a conclusion is rampant with dangerous consequences. However, it is a foreseeable conclusion considering that higher criticism is unable to determine any original sources despite its pseudo-scientific approach. Instead, higher criticism results in the number of sources being "multiplied in infinitum."⁶⁸ According to the documentary hypothesis, scholars can justifiably divide and subdivide scripture infinitely.⁶⁹ One may rightly ponder if there is ever an end to the madness.

Third, higher criticism concludes that scripture, especially the Pentateuch, derives from multiple authors or redactors, despite the lack of testable proof to substantiate this claim. However, such varied and numerous authors and sources cannot

⁶⁶Bruce K. Waltke, "Harold Bloom and 'J'," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (December 1991): 509-11.

⁶⁷Reich, 76.

⁶⁸Ibid., 74.

⁶⁹William Henry Green, *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 73.

result in such a unified, cohesive work as the Pentateuch and Old Testament.⁷⁰

Furthermore, proper reading reveals that unity is found throughout the text, as seen by word plays, cross-referencing, and other literary mechanisms. Therefore, one must conclude that it is illogical to deem this the work of multiple individuals. Rather, such unity must derive from a single person, whether he is the author or editor.

The above-mentioned conclusions of higher criticism pose great danger to biblical scholarship. Riley outlines three specific consequences already actualized. First, schools, including seminaries, became institutions of skepticism and doubt rather than places of learning and discovery. Indoctrination replaced the search for knowledge. Second, pastors and church leaders stopped teaching doctrines and espoused science and reason as the new god. Third, Jesus' followers became his betrayers.⁷¹

The moment the Bible became a book containing old text rather than the inspired word of God, Christianity began walking the wide path of false teachings. However, accurate understanding of the text allows scholars to refute the false conclusions of higher criticism. In regards to Mosaic authorship, there is evidence to accept Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. First, Jews have claimed Moses as the author for centuries. Second, both the Old and New Testaments attest to Mosaic authorship (2 Kgs 22:8; Ezra 3:2; 6:18; Neh 8:1, 18; Mal 4:4; Matt 8:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:29, 31; John 8:5; Acts 28:23; etc.). Third, the style of the Pentateuch

⁷⁰Osgood and Bishop, *Anti-Higher Criticism*, 40-42.

⁷¹Riley, *The Finality of Higher Criticism*, 39-60.

corresponds to writing during the journey in the wilderness and the interactions with various people-groups along the way.⁷²

Although Austruc claimed that the use of the two names of God, Yahweh and Elohim, prove that each section derived from two different sources, it is easy to explain the reason for the two names. When one examines the full context of each name's use, one notices that each expresses an aspect of God's relationship to his creation. The name Yahweh is used when dealing with God's transcendence; Elohim is used when dealing with God's immanence.⁷³ This conclusion compliments the single author concept without destroying Biblical theology or traditional evangelical doctrines. It also points to an intentional use of each name by God and the author.

Conclusion

Evangelicals often cringe at the phrase 'higher criticism' and shy away from its methodology. However, they acknowledge that Luke used sources to compose his gospel and Acts (Luke 1:1-3). The difference, they claim, is that Luke was a single author while Austruc and Wellhausen propose multiple authors over a long period. Therefore, evangelicals reject multiple authors, not multiple sources.

Higher criticism began with atheistic speculations and a desire to discredit scripture. Later critics sought to rip apart the text in order to determine the supposed sources rather than understand the message of God's word. Some higher critics attempt to maintain Biblical inspiration and authority while slicing the text apart without reason.

⁷²Osgood and Bishop, *Anti-Higher Criticism*, 72-81.

⁷³Phillips, *The Failure of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament*, 91.

Reich appropriately compares this to that of an art critic physically ripping apart a painting while attempting to retain its beauty and value.⁷⁴ One must conclude that little to no proof of sources exists beyond the critic's imagination. It is no wonder that Green stated that the "advocates of the documentary hypothesis may here be summoned as witnesses against themselves."⁷⁵

While higher criticism may offer tremendous insights into the origins of the Bible, it is clearly rooted in an anti-Biblical bias and atheistic theology. Because of its rapid spread, by the late 1800s, the critics "ransacked [the Hebrew Bible] from beginning to end"⁷⁶ in their attempt to discredit God's word. Modern critics must not ignore the roots and historical context surrounding higher criticism. In fact, if critics wish to remain true to the intent of higher criticism, then they must subject the critical methodology to its own rules by examining its origins.

Christian scholars are wise to refrain from higher critical methodologies that usurp scripture's authority, veracity, and inspiration. Higher criticism possesses a dangerous history, may lead to catastrophic results, and runs the risk of unraveling the fabric of the Christian faith. Scholars must join Wray, who states that there is no need to use methods that "substitute difficulty for absurdity and loads the scriptures down with the suspicion of honesty."⁷⁷

⁷⁴Reich, *The Failure of the 'Higher Criticism' of the Bible*, 76.

⁷⁵Green, *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch*, 73.

⁷⁶McMullen, *The Supremacy of the Bible*, 352.

⁷⁷Wray, *Must the Bible Go?*, 36.

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