

Holt, John Marshall, The Patriarchs of Israel (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press) 1964

p. 9 Thanks to the literary-critical and form-critical scholarship of the nineteenth century, readers of the Bible can now recognize in Genesis, the rest of the Pentateuch, and on into the following Book of Joshua four main sources of tradition that have been combined and interwoven with each other to form the story of the emergence of Israel in the form in which we now have that story. It is as if a publisher brought out four successive editions of a book, each one expanded and improved to put the point across more fully and telling than the preceding one. Beginning with the Yahwist, J Source in the tenth century B.C., the tradition was expanded by the addition of the Elohist, E Source something over a century later, then by the Deuteronomic, D Source in the seventh or sixth century, and finally by the Priestly, P Source no later than 400 B.C.

p. 10 Once we have learned to turn an analytical eye on the composite product of the sources, we can acknowledge that they made their point well, superlatively so. We can further see that the sources made use of material that, with our categories of thinking, we call myth and legend as well as what we think of as history. Biblical criticism has had to fight every inch of the way against the resistance of those willing to recognize only historical fact as truth, as if myth and legend did not proclaim other kinds of truth especially appropriate to those forms of writing and speaking.

p. 15 The nineteenth century saw the full appearance of that "higher" criticism which sought to evaluate the received material of the Old Testament under the rubrics of authorship, date and place of composition, theological bias, and other questions that contribute to the adequate interpretation of any document received from the past. For those of us who live after this movement it is apparent on the face of it that anyone who wishes to acquire a respectable understanding of the past must take such a "critical" approach toward his sources, but when the pioneers of literary criticism proceeded to study the Old Testament this way, a story of protest broke around their heads. It has not entirely subsided yet, but within most circles there is now a genuine and grateful acknowledgement of the fundamental soundness and necessity of ~~the~~ the critics' methods and, in the main, of their principal results.

p. 17 The work of Wellhausen, Gunkel, and the other masters of literary criticism was informed by the prevailing "developmental" thought of their time and happens to have come before modern archaeology emerged as a proper science. Our present recognition of the fallacy of that reigning philosophy must not, however, drive us to contempt or disdain for their having not thought ahead of their age or having reached conclusions that must now be modified in view of subsequent discovery. Much of what they had to say remains definitive for study of the Bible, but there are other resources to which we may now turn. . . . Some modification of the earlier conclusions of literary critical study is called for, even if the new knowledge has raised, as it should, questions of which no one had previously thought.

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