**THE FUNDAMENTALS: A TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH**

**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 2. THE MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH**

BY PROFESSOR GEORGE FREDERICK WRIGHT, D.D. , LL. D., OBERLIN COLLEGE, OBERLIN, OHIO

During the last quarter of a century an influential school of critics has deluged the world with articles and volumes attempting to prove that the Pentateuch did not originate during the time of Moses, and that most of the laws attributed to him did not come into existence until several centuries after his death, and many of them not till the time of Ezekiel. By these critics the patriarchs are relegated to the realm of myth or dim legend and the history of the Pentateuch generally is discredited. In answering these destructive contentions and defending the history which they discredit we can do no better than to give a brief summary of the arguments of Mr. Harold M. Wiener, a young orthodox Jew, who is both a well established barrister in London, and a scholar of the widest attainments. What he has written upon the subject during the last ten years would fill a thousand octavo pages; while our condensation must be limited to less than twenty. In approaching the subject it comes in place to consider

**I. THE BURDEN OF PROOF**

The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch has until very recent times been accepted without question by both Jews and Christians. Such acceptance, coming down to us in unbroken line from the earliest times of which we have any information, gives it the support of what is called general consent, which, while perhaps not absolutely conclusive, compels those who would discredit it to produce incontrovertible opposing evidence. But the evidence which the critics produce in this case is wholly circumstantial, consisting of inferences derived from a literary analysis of the documents and from the application of a discredited evolutionary theory concerning the development of human institutions.

**II. FAILURE OF THE ARGUMENT FROM LITERARY ANALYSIS**

**(a) Evidence of Textual Criticism.**

It is an instructive commentary upon the scholarly pretensions of this whole school of critics that, without adequate examination of the facts, they have based their analysis of the Pentateuch upon the text which is found in our ordinary Hebrew Bibles. While the students of the New Testament have expended an immense amount of effort in the comparison of manuscripts, and versions, and quotations to determine the original text, these Old Testament critics have done scarcely anything in that direction. This is certainly a most unscholarly proceeding, yet it is admitted to be the fact by a higher critic of no less eminence than Principal J. Skinner of Cambridge, England, who has been compelled to write: "I do not happen to know of any work which deals exhaustively with the subject, the determination of the original Hebrew texts from the critical standpoints."

Now the fact is that while the current Hebrew text, known as the Massoretic, was not established until about the seventh century A.D., we have abundant material with which to compare it and carry us back to that current a thousand years nearer the time of the original composition, of the books. (1) The Greek translation known as the Septuagint was made from Hebrew manuscripts current two or three centuries before the Christian era. It is from this version that most of the quotations in the New Testament are made. Of the 350 quotations from the Old Testament in the New, 300, while differing more or less from the Massoretic text, do not differ materially from the Septuagint. (2) The Samaritans early broke away from the Jews and began the transmission of a Hebrew text of the Pentateuch on an independent line which has continued down to the present day. (3) Besides this three other Greek versions were made long before the establishment of the Massoretic text. The most important of these was one by Aquila, who was so punctilious that he transliterated the word Jehovah in the old Hebrew characters, instead of translating it by the Greek word meaning Lord as was done in the Septuagint. (4) Early Syriac material often provides much information concerning the original Hebrew text. (5) The translation into Latin known as the Vulgate preceded the Massoretic text by some centuries, and was made by Jerome, who was noted as a Hebrew scholar. But Augustine thought it sacrilegious not to be content with the Septuagint.

All this material furnishes ample ground for correcting in minor particulars the current Hebrew text; and this can be done on well established scientific principles which largely eliminate conjectural emendations. This argument has been elaborated by a number of scholars, notably by Dahse, one of the most brilliant of Germany's younger scholars, first in the "Archiv fuer Religions-Wissenschaft" for 1903, pp. 305-319, and again in an article which will appear in the "Nene Kirchliche Zeitschrift" for this year; and he is following up his attack on the critical theories with an important book entitled, "Textkritische Materialien zur Hexatenchfrage," which will shortly be published in Germany. Although so long a time has elapsed since the publication of his first article on the subject, and in spite of the fact that it attracted world-wide attention and has often been referred to since, no German critic has yet produced an answer to it. In England and America Dr. Redpath and Mr. Wiener have driven home the argument. (See Wiener's "Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism", and "Origin of the Pentateuch.")

On bringing the light of this evidence to bear upon the subject some remarkable results are brought out, the most important of which relate to the very foundation upon which the theories concerning the fragmentary character of the Pentateuch are based. The most prominent clue to the documentary division is derived from the supposed use by different writers of the two words, "Jehovah" and "Elohim," to designate the deity. Jehovah was translated in the Septuagint by a word meaning "Lord", which appears in our authorized version in capitalized form, "LORD." The revisers of 1880, however, have simply transliterated the word, so that "Jehovah" usually appears in the revision wherever "LORD" appeared in the authorized version. Elohim is everywhere translated by the general word for deity, "God."

Now the original critical division into documents was made on the supposition that several hundred years later than Moses there arose two schools of writers, one of which, in Judah, used the word "Jehovah" when they spoke of the deity, and the other, in the Northern Kingdom, "Elohim." And so the critics came to designate one set of passages as belonging to the 'J' document and the other to the 'E' document. These they supposed had been cut up and pieced together by a later editor so as to make the existing continuous narrative. But when, as frequently occurred, one of these words is found in passages where it is thought the other word should have been used, it is supposed, wholly on theoretical grounds, that a mistake had been made by the editor, or, as they call him, the "redactor," and so with no further ceremony the objection is arbitrarily removed without consulting the direct, textual evidence.

But upon comparing the early texts, versions, and quotations it appears that the words, "Jehovah" and "Elohim," were so nearly synonymous that there was originally little uniformity in their use. Jehovah is the Jewish name of the deity, and Elohim the title. The use of the words is precisely like that of the English in referring to their king or the Americans to their president. In ordinary usage, "George V.", "the king," and "King George" are synonymous in their meaning. Similarly "Taft," "the president," and "President Taft" are used by Americans during his term of office to indicate an identical concept. So it was with the Hebrews. "Jehovah" was the name, "Elohim" the title, and "Jehovah Elohim" - Lord God - signified nothing more. Now on consulting the evidence it appears that while in Genesis and the first three chapters of Exodus (where this clue was supposed to be most decisive) Jehovah occurs in the Hebrew text 148 times, in 118 of these places other texts have either Elohim or Jehovah Elohim. In the same section, while Elohim alone occurs 179 times in the Hebrew, in 49 of the passages one or the other designation takes its place; and in the second and third chapters of Genesis where the Hebrew text has Jehovah Elohim (LORD God) 23 times, there is only one passage in which all the texts are unanimous on this point.

These facts, which are now amply verified, utterly destroy the value of the clue which the higher critics have all along ostentatiously put forward to justify their division of the Pentateuch into conflicting 'E' and 'J' documents, and this the critics themselves are now compelled to admit. The only answer which they are able to give is in Dr. Skinner's words that the analysis is correct even if the clue which led to it be false, adding "even if it were proved to be so altogether fallacious, it would not be the first time that a wrong clue has led to true results."

On further examination, in the light of present knowledge (as Wiener and Dahse abundantly show), legitimate criticism removes a large number of the alleged difficulties which are put forward by higher critics and renders of no value many of the supposed clues to the various documents. We have space to notice but one or two of these. In the Massoretic text of Ex. 18: 6 we read that Jethro says to Moses, "I thy father-in-law Jethro am come," while in the seventh verse it is said that Moses goes out to meet his father-in-law and that they exchange greetings and then come into the tent. But how could Jethro speak to Moses before they had had a meeting? The critics say that this confusion arises from the bungling patchwork of an editor who put two discordant accounts together without attempting to cover up the discrepancy. But scientific textual criticism completely removes the difficulty. The Septuagint, the old Syriac version, and a copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch, instead of "I thy father-in-law Jethro am come", read, "And one said unto Moses, behold thy father-in-law Jethro" comes. Here the corruption of a single letter in the Hebrew gives us "behold" in place of "I". When this is observed the objection disappears entirely.

Again, in Gen. 39:20-22 Joseph is said to have been put into the prison "where the king's prisoners were bound. ... And the keeper of the prison" promoted him. But in chapter 40:2-4, 7 it is said that he was "in ward of the house of the captain of the guard ... and the captain of the guard" promoted Joseph. But this discrepancy disappears as soon as an effort is made to determine the original text. In Hebrew, "keeper of the prison" and "captain of the guard" both begin with the same word and in the passages where the "captain of the guard" causes trouble by its appearance, the Septuagint either omitted the phrase or read "keeper of the prison," in one case being supported also by the Vulgate.

In many other instances also, attention to the original text removes the difficulties which have been manufactured from apparent discrepancies in the narrative.

**(b) Delusions of Literary Analysis.**

But even on the assumption of the practical inerrancy of the Massoretic text the arguments against the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch drawn from the literary analysis are seen to be the result of misdirected scholarship, and to be utterly fallacious. The long lists of words adduced as characteristic of the writers to whom the various parts of the Pentateuch are assigned are readily seen to be occasioned by the different objects aimed at in the portions from which the lists are made.

Here, however, it is necessary to add that besides the 'E' and 'J' documents the critics suppose that Deuteronomy, which they designate 'D', is an independent literary production written in the time of Josiah. Furthermore, the critics pretend to have discovered by their analysis another document which they call the Priestly Code and designate as 'P'. This provides the groundwork of most of the narrative, and comprises the entire ceremonial portion of the law. This document, which, according to these critics did not come into existence till the time of Ezekiel, largely consists of special instructions to priests telling them how they were to perform the sacrifices and public ceremonials, and how they were to determine the character of contagious diseases and unsanitary conditions. Such instructions are necessarily made up largely of technical language such as is found in the libraries of lawyers and physicians, and it is easy enough to select from such literature a long list of words which are not to be found in contemporary literature dealing with the ordinary affairs of life and aiming directly at elevating the tone of morality and stimulating devotion to higher spiritual ends. Furthermore, an exhaustive examination (made by Chancellor Lias) of the entire list of words found in this 'P' document attributed to the time of Ezekiel shows absolutely no indication of their belonging to an age later than that of Moses.

The absurdity of the claims of the higher critics to having established the existence of different documents in the Pentateuch by a literary analysis has been shown by a variety of examples. The late Professor C. M. Mead, the most influential of the American revisers of the translation of the Old Testament, in order to exhibit the fallacy of their procedure, took the Book of Romans and arbitrarily divided it into three parts, according as the words "Christ Jesus," "Jesus," or "God" were used; and then by analysis showed that the lists of peculiar words characteristic of these three passages were even more remarkable than those drawn up by the destructive critics of the Pentateuch from the three leading fragments into which they had divided it. The argument from literary analysis after the methods of these critics would prove the composite character of the Epistle to the Romans as fully as that of the critics would prove the composite character of the Pentateuch. A distinguished scholar, Dr. Hayman, formerly head-master of Rugby, by a similar analysis demonstrated the composite character of Robert Burns' little poem addressed to a mouse, half of which is in the purest English and the other half in the broadest Scotch dialect. By the same process it would be easy to prove three Macaulays and three Miltons by selecting lists of words from the documents prepared by them when holding high political offices and from their various prose and poetical writings.

**III. MISUNDERSTANDING LEGAL FORMS AND THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM**

Another source of fallacious reasoning into which these critics have fallen arises from a misunderstanding of the sacrificial system of the Mosaic law. The destructive critics assert that there was no central sanctuary in Palestine until several centuries after its occupation under Joshua, and. that at a later period all sacrifices by the people were forbidden except at the central place when offered by the priests, unless it was where there had been a special theophany. But these statements evince an entire misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the facts. In what the critics reckon as the oldest documents ('J' and 'E') the people were required three times a year to present themselves with sacrifices and offerings "at the house of the Lord" (Ex. 34:26; 23:19). Before the building of the temple this "house of the Lord was at Shiloh" (Josh. 18:1; Judges 18:31; 1 Sam. 2:24). The truth is that the destructive critics upon this point make a most humiliating mistake in repeatedly substituting "sanctuaries" for "altars," assuming that since there was a plurality of altars in the time of the Judges there was therefore a plurality of sanctuaries. They have completely misunderstood the permission given in Ex. 20:24: "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen; in all places, A.V.; [in every place, R.V.], where I record My name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee. And if thou make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones." In reading this passage we are likely to be misled by the erroneous translation. Where the revisers read in "every place" and the authorized version in "all places" the correct translation is "in all the place" or "in the whole place." The word is in the singular number and has a definite article before it. The whole place referred to is Palestine, the Holy Land, where sacrifices such as the patriarchs had offered were always permitted to laymen, provided they made use only of an altar of earth or unhewn stones which was kept free from the adornments and accessories characteristic of heathen altars. These lay sacrifices were recognized in Deuteronomy as well as in Exodus. (Deut. 16:21.) But altars of earth or unhewn stone, often used for the nonce only and having no connection with a temple of any sort, are not houses of God and will not become such on being called sanctuaries by critics several thousand years after they have fallen out of use.

In accordance with this command and permission the Jews have always limited their sacrifices to the land of Palestine. When exiled to foreign lands the Jews to this day have ceased to offer sacrifices. It is true that an experiment was made of setting up a sacrificial system in Egypt for a time by a certain portion of the exiles; but this was soon abandoned. Ultimately a synagogue system was established and worship outside of Palestine was limited to prayer and the reading of Scriptures.

But besides the lay sacrifices which were continued from the patriarchal times and guarded against perversion, there were two other classes of offerings established by statute; namely, those individual offerings which were brought to the "house of God" at the central place of worship and offered with priestly assistance, and the national offerings described in Numbers 28ff. which were brought on behalf of the whole people and not of an individual. A failure to distinguish clearly between these three classes of sacrifices has led the critics into endless confusion, and error has arisen from their inability to understand legal terms and principles. The Pentateuch is not mere literature, but it contains a legal code. It is a product of statesmanship consisting of three distinct elements which have always been recognized by lawgivers; namely, the civil, the moral, and the ceremonial, or what Wiener calls the "jural laws," the "moral code" and "procedure." The jural laws are those the infractions of which can be brought before a court, such as "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark." But "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" can be enforced only by public sentiment and Divine sanctions. The Book of Deuteronomy is largely occupied with the presentation of exhortations and motives, aiming to secure obedience to a higher moral code, and is in this largely followed by the prophets of the Old Dispensation and the preachers of the present day. The moral law supplements the civil law. The ceremonial law consists of directions to the priests for performing the various technical duties, and were of as little interest to the mass of people as are the legal and medical books of the present time. All these strata of the law were naturally and necessarily in existence at the same time. In putting them as successive strata, with the ceremonial law last, the critics have made an egregious and misleading blunder.

**IV. THE POSITIVE EVIDENCE**

Before proceeding to give in conclusion a brief summary of the circumstantial evidence supporting the ordinary belief in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch it is important to define the term. By it we do not mean that Moses wrote all the Pentateuch with his own hand, or that there were no editorial additions made after his death. Moses was the author of the Pentateuchal Code, as Napoleon was of the code which goes under his name. Apparently the Book of Genesis is largely made up from existing documents, of which the history of the expedition of Amraphel in chapter 14 is a noted specimen; while the account of Moses' death, and a few other passages are evidently later editorial additions. But these are not enough to affect the general proposition. The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is supported by the following, among other weighty considerations:

**1.** The Mosaic era was a literary epoch in the world's history when such codes were common. It would have been strange if such a leader had not produced a code of laws. The Tel-el-Amarna tablets and the Code of Hammurabi testify to the literary habits of the time.

**2.** The Pentateuch so perfectly reflects the conditions in Egypt at the period assigned to it that it is difficult to believe that it was a literary product of a later age.

**3.** Its representation of life in the wilderness is so perfect and so many of its laws are adapted only to that life that it is incredible that literary men a thousand years later should have imagined it.

**4.** The laws themselves bear indubitable marks of adaptation to the stage of national development to which they are ascribed. It was the study of Maine's works on ancient law that set Mr. Wiener out upon his re-investigation of the subject.

**5.** The little use that is made of the sanctions of a future life is, as Bishop Warburton ably argued, evidence of an early date and of a peculiar Divine effort to guard the Israelites against the contamination of Egyptian ideas upon the subject.

**6.** The omission of the hen from the lists of clean and unclean birds is incredible if these lists were made late in the nation's history after that domestic fowl had been introduced from India.

**7.** As Rev. A. C. Robinson showed in Volume VII of this series it is incredible that there should have been no intimation in the Pentateuch of the existence of Jerusalem, or of the use of music in the liturgy, nor any use of the phrase, "Lord of Hosts," unless the compilation had been completed before the time of David.

**8.** The subordination of the miraculous elements in the Pentateuch to the critical junctures in the nation's development is such as could be obtained only in genuine history.

**9.** The whole representation conforms to the true law of historical development. Nations do not rise by virtue of inherent resident forces, but through the struggles of great leaders enlightened directly from on high or by contact with others who have already been enlightened.

The defender of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch has no occasion to quail in presence of the critics who deny that authorship and discredit its history. He may boldly challenge their scholarship, deny their conclusions, resent their arrogance, and hold on to his confidence in the well authenticated historical evidence which sufficed for those who first accepted it. Those who now at second hand are popularizing in periodicals, Sunday School lessons, and volumes of greater or less pretentions the errors of these critics must answer to their consciences as best they can, but they should be made to feel that they assume a heavy responsibility in putting themselves forward as leaders of the blind when they themselves are not able to see.