

THE CREATION WARS

Rodger Dalman

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Rodger W. Dalman
5549 Girard Ave. N.
Brooklyn Center, MN 55430

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CHAPTER 1: PRESUPPOSITIONS AND THE CREATION DEBATE: HOW CAN THE TRUTH BE KNOWN?

A. *The Problem of Certainty in Biblical and Archaeological Studies*

One of the most tragic events in history occurred in Genesis 3:1-7. The ancient serpent stood before Eve in the Garden of Eden. The serpent asked Eve to think for herself and evaluate the truthfulness of God's Word. Eve chose to rewrite God's Word and then reject it.¹ That decision had devastating consequences. One impact of that decision was the corruption of human epistemology.² Having rejected God's truth, the human race was forced to create its own truth. The search for a human path to truth has lasted for thousands of years, yet that search has proven to be difficult.³ In the fields of Biblical studies, archaeology, and ancient Near Eastern studies, there has been an ongoing debate about the extent that the Bible should be believed. In archaeology, some authors accept at least part of the Biblical account while others accept very little of it. Most archaeologists believe that knowledge in the field should grow mainly from ancient Near Eastern texts and the archaeological evidence.⁴ Scholars evaluate the historical evidence and try to determine as honestly as possible the nature of past cultures and events. Yet every scholar brings to the search his or her own presuppositions and experiences. These shape and color the historical conclusions that are reached from the evidence. The actual past is often not understood very clearly at all. The limitations of human understanding are often hidden

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In what may be an irony of history, Yamauchi noted that feminist concerns have led some historians to question a reliance on ancient texts in reconstructing history. The feminist problem with ancient texts is that they were written by educated, upper-class, male scribes. Keith Whitelam expressed this concern in reference to the Biblical text. He argued that the Biblical accounts of the Patriarchs and of David are radically irrelevant for understanding Israel's history because they had come from a male dominated perspective. Edwin Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 1-36 in A. R. Millard, *et al*, eds. *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in its Near Eastern Context*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 1.

Epistemology is the study of how truth can be known. A person's epistemology consists in the methods and principles that each person uses to determine the truth.

Yamauchi commented on recent explanations for Israel's origin in Palestine. Yamauchi noted, "*The rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures leaves us at the mercy of the hypotheses of scholars*. We are then left to the hypotheses of scholars who are quite assured that they know when and why scriptural texts were written and what is the best 'scientific' explanation of the archaeological data. Such explanations still require faith, not in the Bible, but faith in the insight of a given scholar's reconstruction." Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 31.

In this context, the Bible is not classified as an ancient Near Eastern text. It is put in a category by itself. This is usually justified by noting the Bible's theological agenda, but all ancient Near Eastern literary texts had a similar theological agenda. The Bible's historical record is usually ruled out of consideration purely from a decision to do so. The extent that the Bible's record is given any weight differs from author to author.

beneath a veil of academic confidence.⁵ Authors project the image that they are authorities and that their opinions deserved to be believed.⁶ Yet even the most confident claims are sometimes correct, sometimes confused, and sometimes completely mistaken. Recent events in the field of Biblical archaeology demonstrate this problem.

In 1975, a large collection of cuneiform tablets was found at Tell Mardikh. The texts contained around 1800 complete tablets and a total of 16,500 tablet pieces of various sizes. Tell Mardikh was the site of the ancient city of Ebla. The Ebla tablets caused a media sensation because they were written two or three centuries before Abraham was born. As translations were proposed for the texts, they were found to have great significance for the Biblical account. The Ebla texts mentioned several cities in Palestine like Gezer, Hazor, Megiddo, and Jerusalem.⁷ David N. Freedman described an important tablet found at Ebla. The tablet described Ebla's trade relations with many town and cities in the region. Freedman noted that the tablet

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Yamauchi discussed the lack of certainty in the academic community. He wrote, "Though scholars are united in their lack of confidence in Scripture and supremely confident in their own theories, they are highly critical of each other's views." Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 31.

In a candid and humorous article, William Propp wrote, "The defining characteristic of modern Western Civilization, and the characteristic that we most take for granted, is intellectual optimism. Perched atop an acrobatic tower of past thinkers, we possess the broadest purview and trust that the next generation will be broader still. True, for both modesty's sake and safety's sake, we claim only to be midgets riding the shoulders of giants. But our confidence in our achievements is unshakable. ... Competition is a word that has occurred routinely in evolutionary discourse ever since Charles Darwin. The peacock's tail should be worse than useless in the survival game. But convince enough peahens that size matters, and the pressure is on to grow bigger and better tails, even at the cost of impaired mobility. That is, attributes that do not obviously contribute to survival, and which even ought to be inimical to survival, can become favored by natural selection. For us academics, our publications are our tail feathers. We compete by beating our peers and predecessors in the display game. This doesn't necessarily procure us mates (though it has been known to happen), but it does win us food and shelter - i.e., our salaries, royalties and honoraria - and the good that is beyond price, namely, formal deference in academic forums." William H. C. Propp, "The Anthropology of Biblical Archaeology," SBL Forum, <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=659>. Propp suggested that the whole maximalist/minimalist controversy was really just scholars trying to compete in their display before a bemused public. Propp went on to compare scholarship to recreational play. He noted that some people complete crossword puzzles. Scholars play mind games instead. Propp argued that some scholars even believed that they were involved in a personal destiny because they played mind games so well. Propp then discussed reasons why society supported scholars at their intellectual play time. While Propp's claims were intended partly as tongue in cheek humor, they were not without an element of truth. Competition, pride, and sales drive scholarship at least as much as a love for the truth. Authors in the field are often dedicated, highly intelligent and well informed. However, authors work in academic fields that are vast and complex webs of interrelated speculations. These webs of speculations often have little to do with historical events in the real world.

Jack Finegan, *Archaeological History of the Ancient Middle East*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979), 43, 365.

mentioned the city of Damascus. Then it named the five cities listed in Genesis 14: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela. Freedman claimed that the tablet spelled the names of these cities in the same way that they were spelled in the Genesis text with only minor changes in the vowels used. Freedman noted that the five towns were named as a group, and that they were listed in the same order that they appeared in the Genesis text. Freedman added that the name Birsha also appeared on this tablet. Birsha was the king of Gomorrah in Genesis, but he was the king of Admah in the Ebla tablet. Since the tablet was written around two centuries before Abraham's time, Freedman argued that Genesis might have been based on very early sources.⁸

For a decade, the Ebla texts seemed to become ever more important. W. Harold Mare argued that the city of Jerusalem appeared in the Ebla texts.⁹ The Ebla texts were claimed to contain a creation account, then a flood account, then two flood accounts. Finegan argued that one of the flood accounts at Ebla resembled the Atrahasis Epic, while the other represented an earlier form of the text. Mitchell Dahood argued that Ebla contained a temple of the Word just as Ugarit worshiped a god named the Voice.¹⁰ Dahood's most famous contention was that the name Ya appeared at Ebla, and that Ya may have been an abbreviation for Yahweh. This claim caused quite an academic debate. Dahood claimed that the name *i-a-da-mu* was found at Ebla. Dahood translated this name as "Ya is Perfect." Dahood supported the presence of the name Ya at Ebla by pointing out that the name Ya or Yo appeared as part of personal names that were associated with Edom and Arabia in Genesis 10:29; 36:33; Joshua 11:1, and 12:19.¹¹

The problems with all of these claims were noted already in 1980 by Robert Biggs. He compared the Ebla texts to the texts from Abu Salabikh. Both sets of texts were from similar time periods but widely separated locations. Ebla was in Syria while Abu Salabikh was located in southeastern Mesopotamia. Biggs noted that literary texts written at this time are often very difficult to translate. In some tablets, it is only possible to get the faintest glimmer of what a text might be about. Biggs claimed that the only time that a literary text from Ebla, Fara, or Abu Salabikh could be fairly clearly translated was when it could be recognized as the prototype of a later text that could be translated more easily. Biggs noted that without such a later parallel, texts from Ebla, Fara and Abu Salabikh are very difficult to understand. Biggs noted that only rarely could two or three successive lines be translated with any confidence. Biggs noted that when his article was written in 1980, only 30 literary texts had been identified at Ebla. Biggs noted that Pettinato had reported the presence of a flood story, a creation story, and a collection of proverbs among these texts, although he did not attempt a translation of them. Biggs noted that he was disturbed by claims that the Ebla texts shed light on the Bible. He noted Freedman's claim that the cities of Genesis 14 could be found on an Ebla tablet, but he pointed out that two of the four names have since then been corrected to different translations. He also noted that the names translated by Freedman as Sodom and Gomorrah actually appeared on a different tablet, and that

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David Noel Freedman, "The Real Story of the Ebla Tablets: Ebla and the Cities of the Plain," *Biblical Archaeologist* 41.4 (1978): 143-64.

W. Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 35.

Mitchell Dahood, "The Minor Prophets and Ebla," 47-67 in Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor, eds. *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983).

¹¹ Mitchell Dahood, "The God Ya at Ebla?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100.4 (1981): 607-08.

the translation of these names was problematic. Biggs also expressed concern about Pettinato and Dahood's reading of the name Ya in personal names. Biggs pointed out a fact that only a cuneiformist would realize. The sign that was being read as *ià* or *jà* in the name Ya could also be read as *i*, *li*, or *ni*.¹² So whether this sign had anything to do with the name Yahweh was problematic.¹³ Biggs noted that the worship of a god named Ya at Ebla was unconvincing.¹⁴

In 1992, Alan Millard discussed the current status of Ebla studies. Millard noted Pettinato's proposed translation of the creation story at Ebla. Pettinato read the text this way.

Lord of heaven and earth:
the earth was not, you created it,
the light of the day was not, you created it,
the morning light you had not [yet] made exist.

Pettinato noted the similarity of these words to Genesis 1. Pettinato also claimed that many Biblical place names were found at Ebla including Sodom, Gomorrah, Hazor, Megiddo, Lachish, Dor, Gaza, and perhaps Jerusalem (Salem). Pettinato claimed that many Biblical personal names were found at Ebla including David, Ishmael, Israel, and Abram. Pettinato also identified the name Ebrum at Ebla and suggested that this name might have referred to Abraham's ancestor Eber in Genesis 10:25.

Millard evaluated Pettinato's claims. Millard noted that some of the personal names in the Bible do appear in the Ebla texts, although the Biblical place names do not. Millard noted that there was a vizier at Ebla named Ebrium or Ebrum, although he was not a king. Millard noted that the name Ebrium at Ebla might come from the same base as the name Eber in Genesis 10:21, but that this was unlikely. Millard noted that nothing at Ebla pointed to the existence of a god named Ya or Yaw at Ebla, and he noted that evidence for the presence of this name at Ugarit was also unsatisfactory. Millard noted that the text translated by Pettinato as a creation account has been translated in a different way by Dietz Otto Edzard. He translated the text this way.

Lord of heaven and earth...you do not.
As on (the) earth (?) like a father,
You don't let the orphan live a life bound by debt (?)

Millard noted that four copies of this text have been found at Ebla and three of those are in Sumerian. Millard noted that Edzard's translation is more in keeping with Sumerian than that of Pettinato.¹⁵ Looking back on the articles by Biggs and Millard, the claims made by Pettinato, Dahood and Freedman seem rather shocking despite the great amount of publicity that they

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Millard discussed the same point a decade later. He noted that Ebla, the *NI* sign could represent *ni*, $\frac{1}{3}$ or *'a*. Alan Millard, "Ebla and the Bible: What's Left (If Anything)," *Bible Review* 8.2 (1992): 28.

In fairness to Dahood, it is not impossible that the *NI* sign at Ebla was a reference to Yahweh. It is simply unproven and rather unlikely.

Robert Biggs, "The Ebla Tablets: An Interim Perspective," *Biblical Archeologist* 43.2 (1980): 76-87.

Millard, "Ebla and the Bible: What's Left (If Anything)," 18-31, 60.

gained when the Ebla texts were first discovered. Claims that seemed very well researched and professional were largely incorrect.

An even more striking example of the Eve problem can be seen in Qumran studies. Philip Davies traced developments in Qumran studies from 1989 to 1994. Davies noted that when the Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered, Roland de Vaux was asked to excavate Khirbet Qumran. De Vaux drew first on a literary tradition to interpret the site. In the 1st century AD, Pliny the Elder had claimed that a colony of Essenes lived on the shore of the Dead Sea. De Vaux began his excavations at Khirbet Qumran hoping to find the Essene settlement. When caves 4, 5, and 6 were found in the Qumran plateau, Khirbet Qumran was accepted as the site of the Essene settlement. Davies noted that the presence of an Essene community at Qumran became one of the "assured results" of Qumran scholarship for two decades.¹⁶ Frank Moore Cross called the Qumran Scrolls the "ancient library of Qumran." Davies noted that by 1994, many Qumran scholars no longer believed that an Essene community ever existed at Khirbet Qumran. Davies noted that this conclusion was reached by looking more carefully at the Qumran Scrolls. Davies noted that a variety of theological positions were actually contained in them. The Temple Scroll, the Damascus Scroll, and the Community Rule did not actually describe the same community. The 4QMMT text was then identified as the writing of an unknown group of Sadducees.

Problems also began to appear with the scroll caves and the archaeology of Khirbet Qumran. It was noted that scrolls in different caves were preserved and protected in different ways. That may suggest that scrolls in different caves were placed there by different groups of people. There has also been an ongoing debate about the purpose of the buildings at Khirbet Qumran. When and for how long were they used as a military outpost? Were the buildings occupied at some point by a religious community? Were the buildings actually factories of some kind? If they were factories, what was made in them, perfume, plant oil, or balsam?¹⁷ Israeli archaeologists Yizhak Magen and Yuval Peleg claimed that Khirbet Qumran was just a pottery factory. They claimed that this conclusion was inescapable from the evidence, and that the buildings at Khirbet Qumran had nothing to do with the scroll caves. Magen and Peleg's "inescapable" conclusion has not convinced everyone. Magen Broshi has also excavated the site. Broshi argued that Khirbet Qumran lacks good clay, and that 10 of the 16 water installations at

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The traditional understanding of the Qumran community can be defended from 1st century AD texts. Pliny reported that a group of Essenes lived on the western shore of the Dead Sea. Josephus and Philo described the Essenes' beliefs. They claimed that the Essenes were interested in herbs and stones. They were curious about the names of angels. They respected Moses. They believed that the soul was immortal. They believed that the wicked would spend the afterlife in a murky cave while the righteous would live beyond the ocean. They also claimed to be able to determine the future. See the discussion in Philip R. Davies, "Eschatology at Qumran," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 42-3. While the claims by Pliny, Josephus, and Philo could be incorrect, the importance of angels at Qumran is documented in the Qumran scrolls. That would suggest some accuracy in their descriptions. The amount of detail in their claims is striking. It would seem reasonable from their claims to believe that a group of Essenes did live on the Dead Sea shore. They may or may not have lived at Qumran. However, no other location for an Essene community seems highly likely.

Philip R. Davies, "Khirbet Qumran Revisited," 126-42 in Michael D. Coogan, et al, eds. *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

Qumran were ritual baths.¹⁸ The conclusion of this discussion is that a site can be world famous, and its interpretation can hold the status of an assured and verified truth. Yet the site may still be completely misunderstood. Davies noted that it may surprise non-archaeologists to realize the dramatically different interpretations that can be given to the same evidence.¹⁹ Davies noted that notorious difficulties can be involved in understanding archaeological evidence.²⁰

This context is important for understanding recent developments in the fields of Biblical studies, archaeology, and ancient Near Eastern studies. The strongest conclusions reached by the best scholars may still be incorrect, and academic credentials are no guarantee of accuracy. Each author applies his or her own presuppositions both to the selection of evidence and to the interpretation of the evidence that is selected. There is especially in archaeology a strong desire to correct the errors of the past. Yet as the evidence is constantly re-examined, sometimes the field moves closer to the truth, and sometimes it moves further away. It is important to realize this fact because the fields of Biblical Studies, archaeology, and ancient Near Eastern studies are often dominated by perspectives that are opposed to the truth of God's Word. Eve's choice of a human epistemology rather than the divine Word has echoed down to the 21st century. One example of Eve's choice can be seen in a comment by William Dever. He wrote the following.

More than simple neglect is involved in biblical scholar's typical exclusion of archaeological evidence in discussing 2 Kings 23, or any other aspect of the Israelite cult. The most benign explanation of the omission would be that most historians of ancient Israel have been trained not as historians but as philologists, and thus have been quite naturally preoccupied with analysis of the texts, which do indeed pose sufficient problems in themselves. There is,

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Hershel Shanks, "Qumran-The Pottery Factory," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32.5 (September/October 2006), 26-32.

Non-specialists often fail to grasp how tenuous Biblical studies, historical studies, and archaeological research may be. Their failure to understand this is partly a fault of the academic fields. In the highly competitive arenas of Biblical studies, ancient Near Eastern studies, and archaeology, many authors present their suggestions as if they were conclusions proven from the evidence. Sales skills are a key element of academic success, and often only tenured faculty can afford to present their research as a tentative possibility. Rather few authors note honestly the uncertainties behind their suggestions. Adam Zertal discussed the difficulties involved in using archaeological evidence to understand the past. Zertal claimed that archaeology stood somewhere between the natural sciences and the humanities. Zertal noted that archaeology used modern technologies, but many of its conclusions were drawn from intuition instead of objective measurement. Zertal noted that archaeological excavations and publications differed in their quality, and controversies about the results of excavations often developed. Zertal noted that one author may claim that a site was destroyed in 900 BC. Another author may claim 800 BC, while a third may claim that the site was peacefully abandoned. Zertal noted that even when an archaeological report was done well, it could contain an overwhelming number of hypotheses, suppositions, and presuppositions. All of these may be supported by a mass of data. Zertal noted that Biblical historians often ignored the archaeological materials because they were too uncertain. Adam Zertal, "Following the Pottery Trail: Israel Enters Canaan," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17.5 (1991): 28-38.

²⁰ Davies, "Khirbet Qumran Revisited," 131.

however, a rather naive historiographical presupposition here, namely that the biblical texts alone, properly understood, will yield an adequate history. At best, this leads to what G. Garbini (1988:7) and other have rightly characterized as simply paraphrasing the Bible. At worst, biblical scholars have formed an unconscious (?) alignment with the theological biases of the orthodox nationalist, minority parties that shaped the literary tradition in the Hebrew Bible in its final form in the postexilic period.²¹

Beyond this, Dever argued that the Bible was only literature. He argued that constructions of Israel's history based on literary texts were problematic because texts were written and edited for tendentious purposes. Dever argued that even Form Critical studies by Gunkel and others were problematic. They assumed that an original kernel of historical truth could be identified within a text. Dever argued that Biblical history was not real life but the product of literary imagination. Real history could not be reconstructed from it. Dever argued that archaeological evidence was not subject to an editorial process like literary texts, so it provided a more objective witness to the past.²²

Dever's comments reflected a presupposition about Scripture that has been very common in the mainstream academic environment.²³ The assumption is that God's Word can not be believed. Israel's history can not be reconstructed on the basis of the Biblical account, and it is simply naive to attempt to do so. This broad perspective led to an interesting claim by Bruce Routledge in a 1998 conference at the University of Pennsylvania. Routledge argued, "If you want to learn more about the Bible, stop looking at the Bible. If you want to learn more about ancient Israel, stop looking at ancient Israel."²⁴ Along the same lines, Philip Davies claimed that,

We are emerging from a huge mistake that both biblical scholars and, to some extent, though perhaps less, archaeologists have been making. That mistake is simply to assume that a literary collection like the Bible and the data unearthed by archaeology can possibly be made to tell the same kind of story. To try to combine them into a single story is precisely where we have been going wrong. Why should we seek to make one story out of two?²⁵

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William G. Dever, "The Silence of the Text: An Archaeological Commentary on 2 Kings 23," 143-68 in Michael D. Coogan, et al, eds. *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 144.

²² Davies, "Khirbet Qumran Revisited," 144-45.

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For example, Nadav Na'aman argued that David and Solomon did not unite the monarchy. The Bible's writers united it. Na'aman argued that the Bible's authors created a unity for the nation by the way that they wrote its history. See the discussion of Na'aman's claim in Amy Dockser Marcus, *The View from Nebo: How Archaeology Is Rewriting the Bible and Reshaping the Middle East*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 127-28. Na'aman assumed that the Bible's authors wrote their account for theological reasons, and that their account did not reflect accurately the history of the region.

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²⁵ Routledge was quoted in Marcus, *The View from Nebo*: 20.

This comment was made in a discussion between Philip Davies and Amy Marcus. For the context, see Marcus, *The View from Nebo*, 22.

The problems with this position can be seen in the earlier discussion about Ebla and Qumran. Scholars may present their finding with an impressive sense of personal presence and importance. They may sound confident, assured, professional, scholarly, and significant. They may assemble a wide array of historical and archaeological facts. They may achieve considerable status both within the field and beyond its walls. Yet they may be completely mistaken.

Why does this happen? The last 50 years have seen an explosion of information in every field. The amount of available information has become so large that it is almost impossible for any scholar to remain current in his own discipline. The information glut can not be managed effectively. It is too vast to organize or evaluate. As scholars float in a flood of information, they approach the sea of data with presuppositions about history and life. These presuppositions often determine the evidence that is identified as important, and these presuppositions often shape the conclusions that are drawn from the evidence. Historical perspectives grow from the interaction between these presuppositions, the Biblical text, and ancient Near Eastern evidence. The lesson taught by this is the importance of reading critically. The appearance of academic competency is no guarantee at all that a position being defended is correct.²⁶ The agreement of several authors in the field is also of only limited value in evaluating the accuracy of the conclusions being defended. It is always vital to start with the evidence and see where it actually leads, and the Biblical text is always vital evidence in any discussion of Israel's history.

B. The Declining Documentary Hypothesis and Other Perspectives

How can truth be found? There is no simple answer to that question. An Evangelical will respond that God's Word is true and that it should be believed. This is right, but it hardly solves the problem. Evangelicals are as trapped by Eve's problem as those who don't believe God's Word at all. Every Evangelical brings to God's Word a set of presuppositions and assumptions. These affect the verses chosen for any debate, and they affect the conclusions that are drawn from those verses. This is why Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians draw such different interpretations of the same Word. Authors in each denomination tend to declare that their Biblical interpretation is correct while believing that members of other denominations are led astray by tradition, pride, foolishness, or revolt against God. Members of denominations that are less academic and more charismatic often argue that they don't need to study the evidence. They claim to have been led by God's Spirit into all truth. So any denial of their perspective becomes also a rebellion against God. Pride easily becomes bound up in such claims. Pastors sometimes seem to claim that they are right, and that God would not allow them to be wrong. Similar claims to Spirit leading have

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It helps to remember that many books and journal articles grow from the authors' doctoral dissertations. There are three requirements for a dissertation. First, it must give an adequate survey of material in the field related to the topic of the dissertation. Second, it must present a case that no one has presented before. Third it must make a reasonable defense of the new suggestion. There is no requirement that a dissertation be correct. Most are not correct. They are just defensible. Dissertations are then summarized as journal articles. The articles are often accepted precisely because they make a case for a new idea. As often as not, the new idea has not been previously defended because it is wrong. Never assume that the content of a book or academic journal article is widely accepted in the field.

been made by defenders of almost every theological position. Even Mormon missionaries have claimed that their position is correct because they have been led by the Holy Spirit.²⁷ While God's Spirit does lead and teach His children, claims of Spirit leading should not replace an honest search for hard evidence and better Biblical exegesis.²⁸ Is it possible to grow beyond accepted presuppositions, assumptions, and experiences without losing the bedrock of faith? It is possible, although it places truth seekers on rather dangerous ground. Often the truth that is found can disrupt a career path.

How can truth be sought? A search for truth must be first of all a search for humility before God, before others, and before the evidence. Pride is the greatest obstacle to truth. Yet pride is the basic human condition. It grows directly from Eve's choice, and it is ultimately inescapable. None of us will see the truth clearly until Christ returns and removes the blinders that we wear because we fall short of God's glory. A search for truth requires deep confidence in the reliability of God's Word, but it also requires equally deep skepticism of our own understanding. While God's Word is completely true, our understanding of it can be only partly right. The search for truth must be rooted in the realization that each position and belief may be imperfect or misunderstood. The search for truth is a Spirit led search for evidence, a search for different ways that the evidence can be interpreted, and a search for our own errors. Few people are willing to do that. Many Evangelicals take a strong stand on the perspicuity of Scripture. By perspicuity, they mean that God's Word can be understood. While correct as far as that goes, the doctrine is often applied to mean that one's own beliefs must be true. Used that way, it often justifies pride instead of leading to truth.

How can such a search be conducted? It is important to read very widely in the field. Little can be learned by reading only those authors that agree with one's own presuppositions and experiences. It is also important to read critically. Always ask what evidence an author uses to support his or her claims, and ask whether the evidence really justifies the conclusions being presented. It is important to read conservative Evangelical authors because their work is grounded on faith that the Bible is true.²⁹ Yet there is a downside to reading only Evangelical studies. Conservatives tend to fear new ideas, and their books are often half a century out of date. Too often, conservative authors repeat claims that have been made by countless other authors. There is a lot to be gained by reading authors in the mainstream as well. Perhaps 75% of the books and articles written from a liberal perspective are mistaken and are of little real use to an Evangelical pastor. Yet if read critically from a conservative orientation, new and valuable evidence can sometimes be gained from moderately liberal works. Mainstream authors typically

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The author discussed Mormon theology with two Mormon missionaries a few years ago. The author asked one if he really believed the claims that he taught. The Mormon missionary stated that he had struggled with that question for several years, and he had prayed fervently about it. Then he claimed that the Holy Spirit had confirmed to his soul the truth of Later Day Saints' doctrine, and the Holy Spirit had led him into all truth. Most Evangelicals would not agree with his interpretation of his spiritual struggles, but there is no easy way to refute a claim of Spirit leading.

²⁸ Job 32:8; 38:36

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For academic work, the best sources are academic journals. They provide state of the art research. In the Evangelical world, the leading journals include: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, *Westminster Theological Journal*, *Calvin Theological Journal*, *Presbyterion*, *Tyndale Bulletin*, and a wide variety of Baptist journals like *Bibliotheca Sacra*.

use new and valuable evidence for decades before Evangelicals become aware of the discussion. So a search for truth requires wide reading and thoughtful evaluation of what is read. When reading authors in the mainstream, it is vital to understand their presuppositions and the basic positions represented in the field. Several of those positions will now be discussed.

1) LIBERALISM AND THE PROTESTANT DILEMMA

Before the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church accepted two ideas that were very important. The first idea was called the "seamless robe of Christ." This belief taught that Christ's church contained a great deal of diversity, but it was still one church. The Protestant world has replaced the seamless robe with the spiritual unity of the church universal. Yet the church universal is largely a theoretical construct while the church visible has been split into hundreds of factions. This disintegration of Christ's body has been unfortunate because it has set exegetical possibilities into the granite of denominational authority and tradition. This has often hindered an honest search for the truth because truth can not always be safely sought beyond the bounds on the denomination. This in turn has led many scholars who seek intellectual freedom to work outside of the walls of the church, and it has contributed to the divorce of the church from the university.

The second important idea was Rome's view of authority. Rome held that the Bible was true and authoritative. Yet the Bible was a reflection of the church, and the Bible's authority could not be separated from the authority of the church. The same kind of authority was held by the pope's *ex cathedra* proclamations, and it was expressed in the writings of the church fathers. Authority in the Roman church was both the Bible and the Bible as it was applied and interpreted by the church. Luther, Calvin, and the Reformers broke with Rome's view of authority. They stressed that only the Bible was God's Word, and only the Bible was to be the authority in and for the church. Their stand on *Sola Scriptura* was right and proper, but it raised a serious problem. If the church did not give the authoritative interpretation of the Bible, who did determine it?

As the Reformation unfolded, the Reformation spun off a variety of denominations. Most of these denominations adopted confessional standards like the Westminster Confession. These documents gave the denomination's understanding of the Bible's meaning. In theory, these confessional standards had no authority in themselves. They had authority only in so far as they reflected accurately the teaching of Scripture. Yet they tended to speak clearly in areas where the Bible was somewhat ambiguous, and their teaching was assumed to be the clear teaching of Scripture. The role of these confessional documents has been understood somewhat differently from denomination to denomination, but they have often functioned as the practical authority for the church.

While confessional standards settled the meaning of Scripture for specific denominations, the Reformation never found a way to determine proper Biblical exegesis outside the boundaries of each denomination. Who had the right to determine what the Bible meant? Since giving each individual the right to interpret Scripture for himself could produce error and confusion, some authority was needed to limit odd interpretations. That authority was found in the trained Biblical scholar. So the Roman church's *ex cathedra* authority was often replaced in practice by the authority of the theological faculty. This was the true seedbed for modern liberalism. At heart, liberalism has been the thinking scholars' freedom from all outside authority. So liberalism was uniquely a Protestant problem until the last few decades. Only fairly recently has it

expanded to the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox orbits, and it has often come to those communions through the doorway of the universities.

Liberalism has been problematic to the extent that individual scholars have departed from the truth of God's Word. Scholars who define themselves as liberal defend a wide variety of positions. There is no liberal theology per se. Liberals share a determination to be free from the authority of the Bible or the church. They share substantial confidence in the ability of the thinking scholar to determine the nature of reality. They also often refused to believe that the prophets could foretell the future or that miracles could occur. Yet that is an oversimplification. Words like "liberal" actually reflect to such a wide variety of authors and positions that they can not be easily categorized. When reading books and articles by "liberal" authors, it is also very important not to equate "liberal" with "non-Christian." Pastors, scholars, authors, and professors who could be placed in the "liberal" camp are often people who know and love the Lord. They are often serious and sober scholars who seek the truth with great devotion. They sometimes reach mistaken conclusions because they have accepted incorrect presuppositions. Yet they are often brothers in the Lord who deserve to be treated with Christ's love.

2) THE DECLINING DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

The most important mainstream, liberal position in Biblical studies is the Documentary Hypothesis. While the Documentary Hypothesis is almost completely wrong, it still dominates Biblical Studies departments in secular universities, and it is equally dominant in many left of center Christian colleges. Roughly half of the Christian academic world believes that the Documentary Hypothesis is correct. In order to understand mainstream books and articles about the Bible, it is important to understand what the Documentary Hypothesis claims.

The Documentary Hypothesis developed at a time when European philosophy was still heavily influenced by a philosophical perspective called Idealism. This perspective had its roots in the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, and it had always been a potent force in Christian theology. Idealism claimed that the ultimate reality was Mind. That may seem strange and foreign in a frontier culture like North America,³⁰ but there is something to be said for it. God created and sustains all things. Elihu claimed in Job 34:14 that all life would cease if God gathered His Spirit and His breath back to Himself. God is omnipresent within and beneath His creation. Is the ultimate reality then God or the physical world that He created? It is a fair question. The problems with Idealism are that many forms of it see a different Mind behind reality than the God of the Bible, and many forms of it end up denying the distinction between the Creator and His creation.

Within Idealism, the human mind slowly came to be seen as the ultimate reality instead of God's mind. This was consistent with Eve's primal error in Eden. Man became the measure of all things instead of God. This led to a great confidence in the ability of an important scholar to sit in his office and figure out the truth with limited hard evidence. At the end of the 18th century, Immanuel Kant wrote a book called *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant had a huge impact on European philosophy, and his influence eventually spread worldwide. Kant divided reality into two realms, a heavenly or spiritual realm, and an earthly realm. Kant believed that people could

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In a formerly frontier culture, the practical remains far more important than the theoretical. That may be why self help books sell so much better than theology or philosophy in parts of North America while philosophy remains important in parts of Europe.

only know what they gained through their senses from the earthly realm. They could know nothing about the spiritual realm, although pure reason may shed light on it. Kant argued that physical objects were ultimately unreal because the ultimate reality was Mind. Yet Kant claimed that men could only know what they gained through sense perceptions from the earthly realms physical objects. Kant's emphasis led the academic community to turn away from questions about God that could not be answered. Instead, the academic world began to focus only on the physical world in its search for truth.

Kant was followed by a German philosopher name Georg W. F. Hegel. He was the most important philosopher of his generation. Hegel wrote in a way that no one could understand. Philosophers still talk about his "two sidedness." Since he was so hard to understand, thousands of young scholars spent their lives studying his thought. He was interpreted as being too "deep" for anyone to fathom. His students fell into two groups, conservative Hegelians and radical Hegelians. The conservative Hegelians believed that Hegel's ultimate reality was God. The radical Hegelians believed that Hegel's ultimate reality was man. Hegel structured reality in a dialectic that could be traced in a different form back to Plato and perhaps ancient Egyptian thought behind him. Hegel's dialectic claimed that every statement or historical reality could be called a thesis. Every thesis was constantly competing with a rival thesis that Hegel called an antithesis. As the thesis and antithesis interacted and competed, they gave rise to a higher synthesis drawn from each. That synthesis immediately became itself a thesis. As it interacted with a new antithesis, it produced a new synthesis. That new synthesis immediately became a new thesis and so forth. As this process occurred, Hegel believed that the dialectic led to higher forms of reality, and it eventually reached the ultimate Mind.

That philosophical system may seem strange, foreign, and irrelevant. However, it shaped much of the modern world. Hegel had much of his influence through the radical Hegelians who studied his thought. The radical Hegelians included Karl Marx who applied Hegel's dialectic to economics, Charles Darwin who applied Hegel's dialectic to biology, and Julius Wellhausen who applied Hegel's dialectic to the Old Testament. Wellhausen drew on the work of earlier authors and on Hegelian principles to construct the polished form of the Documentary Hypothesis.³¹ In 1878, he published his *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*.³² Wellhausen based his hypothesis on Hegelian principles. He taught that Israel's oldest traditions were preserved in oral form for many generations. As they were passed on, they were altered and developed

Wellhausen taught that by David's time, all the accounts of Israel's earlier history were no longer accurate. Wellhausen taught that David and Solomon brought literacy to Israel by bringing Canaanite scribes to Jerusalem. The scribes of the United Monarchy collected and recorded Israel's religious traditions. These scribes used the name Yahweh for Israel's God, so Wellhausen called their writing the J source (for Jehovah). At a later time, a second group of

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For a useful survey of authors whose work led up to Wellhausen, see Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), 73-95.

³² Wellhausen built on the work of earlier authors like Witter in 1711 and Astruc in 1753. By Wellhausen's time, the idea had been developing for over a century that Genesis and other books contained earlier sources. It had often been suggested that these earlier sources could be identified by the names used for God in Genesis. Wellhausen did not invent this idea, but he put it into its most popular form. His work marked the climax of a developmental process among those who had little confidence in the accuracy of the Biblical text.

scribes collected more of Israel's religious traditions, although the date for these scribes has been debated. This group of scribes used the name Elohim for Israel's God. So Wellhausen called their writing the E source. As the J and E documents interacted with each other, a synthesis called JE appeared. The next stage in Scripture's development occurred during king Josiah's reign. According to Wellhausen, his scribes wanted to turn Israel's religion into a monotheistic faith for the first time, and they had more advanced ethics than their predecessors. So they wrote the book of Deuteronomy and claimed that it dated back to Moses. They also began a wider history called the Deuteronomic history. This history ran through II Kings. As the Deuteronomy text interacted with the JE material, a synthesis appeared that was JEP. Then during and after the exile, Israel's priests tried to explain why the nation had been carried away into exile. They rewrote everything that had been written before that time. Their additions were the P material. As the P editors interacted with JED, the current JEDP Old Testament text resulted as a synthesis. Books like Genesis were made up of J, E, D, and P material. Followers of Wellhausen also added several other sources like H for legal material. The problem with this is that it is just speculation. Since Wellhausen was an Idealist, he had great faith in the power of human reason. Wellhausen believed that the thinking and reasoning scholar could sit in his office and figure out the truth. That assumption has always stood in the background behind the Documentary Hypothesis. Its defenders have largely carried on their research in their own minds instead of the external world. Pursuit of the hypothesis and its implications has always been only a speculative intellectual exercise. There has been endless debate about which verses in the Bible should be assigned to which redactors or editors and why each proposed older version took the form that it did take.³³ Yet rather little of that debate has been based on hard evidence, and few of its conclusions can be verified.³⁴

Since the Documentary Hypothesis can not be proven true, it has often been defended with condescension. A common refrain has been that all scholars accept the Documentary Hypothesis. Those who do not accept the Documentary Hypothesis have at times been branded as being not real scholars. This kind of claim can be seen in a book by Kathleen Kenyon. She wrote the following.

All reputable modern scholars accept as certain that the Pentateuch, as well as the books of Joshua, Judges, and others earlier in the sequence, only acquired the form in which they have reached us by a very long process of the combination of oral and tribal records, of editing and redaction.³⁵

This simply assumes that the Documentary Hypothesis or some similar approach must be accepted if one is to be a reputable modern scholar. Many authors assume this world view. They see no reason to defend the Documentary Hypothesis, and they accepted it as a given. Of course, whatever authors like Kenyon may claim, many very able scholars do not accept the Documentary Hypothesis.

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For an example, note the discussion of Ex. 33:7-11 in Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 8.

³⁴ For a discussion of the problems in redaction studies of the book of Judges, see Gooding, "The Composition of the Book of Judges," 71*.

³⁵ Kathleen M. Kenyon, *The Bible and Recent Archaeology*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), 7.

In recent years, the Documentary Hypothesis has come under attack from several directions. One ironic attack has come from the minimalists like Thompson and Van Setters. They have been attacking the Documentary Hypothesis with some of the same arguments that supporters of the Documentary Hypothesis have used to attack Evangelicals. They question whether David and Solomon ever ruled an empire in Palestine. They claim that supporters of the Documentary Hypothesis accept the existence of David and Solomon for faith based reasons instead of archaeological evidence. They claim that belief in the historical reality of David and Solomon comes from faith in the Biblical record, and that such faith is inappropriate and academically unacceptable. The Documentary Hypothesis assumed that the J material had been produced by David's scholars. In response to these attacks, the Documentary Hypothesis has been adapted and changed. The E material has slowly been disappearing from the hypothesis, and the J material has been moving much further forward in history. Van Setters argued that the author of J was a theologian who lived and wrote during the exile instead of the United Monarchy. Christof Levin argued that the author of J wrote after Deuteronomy was written during Josiah's reign but before the Deuteronomistic history was written. Against even these suggestions, G. von Rad argued that the author of J was a great theologian and that his work could not be understood within the context of the Documentary Hypothesis.³⁶

One of the more interesting studies to appear among supporters of the Documentary Hypothesis was a study by Yehuda Radday and a large group of associates. Radday et al found a way to use a computer to check evidence for individual sources behind the Biblical text. They entered grammatical elements into a computer program and looked for areas of a book where different kinds of Hebrew were used. Radday and his associates used this method to study the book of Isaiah. They used their findings to argue that the first half of Isaiah was written with a slightly different kind of Hebrew than the second half. Since the critical orbit assumed that the two halves of Isaiah were written by different authors, their results were well received. Evangelicals responded that the second half of Isaiah was written later in Isaiah's life when his language usage had changed slightly, but that was not a very strong response to the evidence. Radday and his associates then decided to use this method on the book of Genesis. They noted that there has been endless debate about which verses in Genesis should be assigned to J, E, D, and P. They expected to find four kinds of Hebrew so that they could finally determine the sources behind the book. Radday and his associates were surprised to find that they did indeed identify four kinds of Hebrew in Genesis, but the four kinds were quite unexpected. Their four kinds of Hebrew were 1) divine speech, 2) human speech, 3) the narration of Genesis before the Joseph story, and 4) the narration of the Joseph account. They noted that the two kinds of narration were very similar. They concluded that at least in Genesis, the Documentary Hypothesis could not be correct. Since their conclusions ran counter to established beliefs in the field, their work on Genesis has not been widely accepted.³⁷

One spin off from the Documentary Hypothesis has been Form Criticism. This discipline appeared at the turn of the last century. A German author named Hermann Gunkel suggested a new way to analyze the Old Testament text. While Gunkel did not disagree with Wellhausen, he

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For a summary of the discussion, see the SBL Forum 8.06 discussion of Rolf Rendtorff, "What Happened to the 'Yahwist'?: Reflections after Thirty Years."

³⁷ Yehuda Radday, et al, *Genesis: An Authorship Study in Computer Assisted Statistical Linguistics*, (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1985).

thought that the Documentary Hypothesis did not provide enough information about the texts actual history. Gunkel suggested that the text should be studied in terms of its literary genres and the types of literature included in it.³⁸ Gunkel wrote when ancient Near Eastern texts were being found and translated. So Gunkel compared the Old Testament texts with these other ancient documents. Gunkel's position became popular in German after World War I and in North America after World War II.

Gunkel's basic position has some validity. There clearly are different genres of literature in the Old Testament. The text contains poetry, wisdom literature, laments, and narrative sections. There is value in comparing the Bible's wisdom literature or laments with wisdom literature or laments across the ancient Near East. Perhaps the most useful Form Critical studies are the books and articles that explore Deuteronomy's relationship to the international treaty pattern. These parallels will be discussed at length later in this study. While Gunkel's basic goal has validity, Form Critical studies are often problematic. The problems come when authors propose genres for the Biblical text that can not be identified elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Often, authors simply make up genres and then declare that the text illustrates their created genres. Both the meaning and accuracy of the text is then evaluated on the basis of these proposed genres.

A more recent spin off from the Documentary Hypothesis has been Tradition Criticism or Redaction Criticism. This perspective assumes that the Documentary Hypothesis is correct. It assumes that specific passages in the Bible can be assigned to J, E, D, and P. It then assumes that it can determine what purpose the editors (or "redactors") of J, E, D, and P may have had in adding their section to the developing text. While this may seem to be a completely speculative undertaking, it has generated countless conference papers, journal articles, and monographs.

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For an Evangelical application of genre criticism, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1-6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993): 41-54.