

The Bible Vindicated! - 5

The story of Abraham which we have been considering occurs in Genesis, the first book of what the Jews refer to as the Torah, and called by Christians the Pentateuch (Five Scrolls). This consists of the first five books of the Old Testament.

The long held view among Jews and Christians has been that Moses was the author of the five books. These provide an account of events from the beginning of the world to the death of Moses.

But what is the current situation? Encyclopedia Britannica reports that “modern literary analysis and criticism of the texts” [which culminated in the writing of Prolegomena to the History of Israel by J Wellhausen in 1878] “has pointed up significant differences in style, vocabulary, and content, apparently indicating a variety of original sources for the first four books, as well as an independent origin for Deuteronomy.”

“According to this view” [Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers] “is a redaction [an adapted, abridged, revised, edited version] primarily of three [pre-existing] documents: the Yahwist, or J (after the German spelling of Yahweh); the Elohist, or E; and the Priestly code, or P.”

Under “Other Pentateuchal Theories” the Encyclopedia continues, “This documentary theory of the composition of the Pentateuch has been challenged by eminent 20th-century scholars who have offered alternative or additional methods of analysis and interpretation” including Form criticism and Tradition criticism.

“Archaeological criticism has tended to substantiate the reliability of the typical historical details of even the oldest periods ...” later adding, “yet most scholars still accept the documentary theory, in its basic lines, as the most adequate and comprehensive ordering of the variegated Pentateuchal materials.”

Very much like the current widespread acceptance of the theory of biological evolution, the acceptance of the documentary theory reflects a similar bias which tends to reject belief in the direct agency of a transcendent entity. Regrettably, both are the case even though scientific discovery increasingly calls for the God whose qualities are so clearly described in the Bible.

Regrettable - most certainly so in the case of the documentary theory, a rejection of the first five books of the Bible must necessarily result in the rejection of the remainder of the Old Testament and of the entire New Testament - and so also of Jesus Christ and Christianity.

This is why there has been an ongoing effort since the work of the Higher Critics, which culminated in that of Wellhausen, to refute their wayward musings. One of these making the effort was J Orr, who wrote The Problem of the Old Testament. Some of his comments are in response to the statement of W M L De Wette, who denied the possibility of Moses writing the Pentateuch. Under the title, “Origin and Progress of Hebrew Literature till the Exile”, he wrote, “The peculiar LEGENDS of the Hebrews ascribe the first use of the art of writing among them to Moses, the founder and lawgiver of their state ; but we must not ascribe to him the foundation of a Hebrew literature, but only a feeble commencement of it ; perhaps he wrote some of its laws.” - De Wette, A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament, Vol. 1, p.24.