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THE TORAH: GOD'S WORD

by Daniel Mann

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The Wellhausen Hypothesis, or the Documentary Hypothesis (DH), had asserted that the Old Testament (OT), especially the Torah, is nothing more than the product of numerous editors who cut and pasted the OT together from a shabby assortment of previously existing documents in order to suit their political agendas. The documentary hypothesis proposes that the five Books of Moses were derived from pre-existing manuscripts that were subsequently combined into the current form by a series of redactors (editors).

Many have ably critiqued the DH. The late OT scholar Gleason Archer concluded, "The Wellhausen theory was allegedly based upon the evidence of the text itself, and yet the evidence of the text is consistently evaded whenever it happens to go counter to the theory."¹

However, there are other ways to debunk the DH. One line of evidence argues that the OT reflects a *divine* agenda rather than a human one, as claimed by the DH. Here are just a very limited number of evidences that we might consider:

Instead of giving the Israelites a sense of superiority, Moses (and the Prophets) consistently revealed how utterly unworthy they were of anything good from God:

It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. (Deut. 9:5–6; all Scripture references NIV)

Israel wasn't chosen by God because they were superior. Instead, they were a stubborn, "stiff-necked" people. No nation trying to convince its people that they were worthy — and this is what people want — would ever try to portray them this way. Besides, why should Israel accept such a disparaging revelation unless the hand of God had been so manifestly present?

In contrast to this disparaging picture, religions use marketplace strategies to lend appeal to their products. Orthodox Jewish writer David Klinghoffer concludes that Jewish rejection of Jesus is founded in "the mystic uniqueness of the Jewish essence or nature. There was something distinct about the Jewish soul....The Jewish soul feels the world in a remarkably visceral way, as unredeemed."

He bases this opinion on Judah Loeb's famous interpretation of the Talmud tractate, *Avodah Zarah*, which stated that God had offered the Torah to all the other nations first, "to see if they possessed a predisposition to the Torah, and did not find it in them," in contrast to what God found in the Jews.²

This type of chauvinism — the aggrandizement of one's own people — is found in all religions. For instance, the Qur'an reads:

You are the best nation ever brought forth to men, bidding to honour, and forbidding dishonour, and believing in Allah. (Surah 3:110–112)

The unbelievers of the People of the Book and the idolaters shall be in the Fire of Gehenna, therein dwelling forever; those are the worst of creatures. (Surah 98:6)

Why is the OT, specifically the Torah, so different in this regard? Perhaps because it confronts us with a divine, rather than a human, perspective.

Moses prophesied Israel's inevitable failures and sufferings:

But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. (Deut. 29:4; 30:6)

He [Israel] abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior. They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God....You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth. The LORD saw this and rejected them...they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful. (Deut. 32:15–19)

No one would invent such a religion. Whenever we try to sell a product, we assure prospective buyers that they will profit from it. Instead, Moses assured the people that they would fail and suffer because of this religion.

Why then did Israel persevere with such an offensive faith? Why did they acknowledge such books as canonical? Only because God had made His presence surpassingly tangible to Israel.

Religions not only aggrandize their particular followers but also prophesy only their future blessedness. However, the Torah (and especially the Prophets) mentions the eventual blessedness of the *Gentiles* (the other nations). God gave Moses a song to teach to Israel, covering both their past and future. It concludes this way: “Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people” (Deut. 32:43).

The Jewish patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are portrayed as scoundrels, pimps, cheats, and liars – not the heroes that the Jewish commentaries portray them to be. For instance:

The Kuzari (Rabbi Judah HaLevi, 1075–1141) states that Abraham was gifted with high intelligence; and, as Maimonides (1135–1204) describes, Abraham didn't blindly accept the ubiquitous idolatry. The whole populace had been duped, but the young Abraham contemplated the matter relentlessly, finally arriving at the conclusion that there is One God.³

Unsurprisingly, God chose Abraham because he was more deserving – more virtuous than others, from a Jewish perspective:

Abram tried to convince his father, Terach, of the folly of idol worship. One day, when Abram was left alone to mind the store, he took a hammer and smashed all of the idols except the largest one. He placed the hammer in the hand of the largest idol. When his father returned and asked what happened, Abram said, "The idols got into a fight, and the big one smashed all the other ones." His father said, "Don't be ridiculous. These idols have no life or power. They can't do anything." Abram replied, "Then why do you worship them?"⁴

Abraham nomadically wandered the length and breadth of the land proclaiming his belief, and he was so successful that he converted thousands to monotheism. His method was one of kindness—he set up a motel, and after feeding and watering

wayfarers they were introduced to the true belief and blessed G-d the Provider. Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women, and together they successfully brought many souls under the wings of the Shechinah, hence resensitizing the world to G-dliness.⁵

These legends reflect our human tendency to aggrandize our forefathers. Instead, they are hardly the role models that we'd invent in order to make our religion appealing to prospective buyers. For example, Abraham had confessed that, out of fear, he had directed his wife to tell everyone that "he is my brother" (Gen. 20:13).

Jacob, who was later named "Israel" through his baffling encounter with God, became the namesake of the Israelite nation. However, according to the Genesis account, he was far less than virtuous. He not only connived his brother Esau out of his birthright but also deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing he had intended for Esau.

The other Israelite heroes are similarly tarnished. The patriarch Judah, the namesake of the Jewish people, visited prostitutes and had intercourse with his daughter-in-law. Moses, arguably the greatest Israelite, was even portrayed as a sinner who was unworthy to enter the Promised Land.

The future monarchy, rather than being presented as God's ideal, appears to be God's reluctant concession to His stubborn people. Furthermore, kings are warned that they are no better or more deserving than others and are subject to the same laws (Deut. 17:19–20). This legislation does not reflect the interests of the monarchy or ruling class, whose interest it would have been to promote a strong monarchy.

Wellhausen postulated that the Israelite religion had been the product of the rich and powerful. However, so many of its laws fail to reflect this self-serving perspective. The poor could glean grapes and grain from the vineyards of the rich (Deut. 24:24–25). Such a law could not protect the interests of the rich and privileged, who characteristically make such laws to protect their own interests.

Furthermore, the Sabbath Year specified, “At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts” (Deut. 15:1–2). Such a law could not favor the rich and powerful. What then could explain its source, if not God?

Slaves had to be freed. “If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free” (Deut. 15:12). This too would not coincide with the interests of the rich and powerful, nor would the institution of a Sabbath day, which gave rest to both slaves and animals.

The Jubilee took the land from the rich and powerful, returning this original inheritance to the poor (Lev. 25:13). Such a law went against prevailing interests to such a degree that we don’t have any evidence that it was *ever* followed.

Whenever soldiers feared for their safety, the law encouraged them to go AWOL—hardly the legislation of a ruling class wanting to protect its interests. Then the officers shall add, “Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home” (Deut. 20:8).

The Levites were not legally entitled to any inheritance of land. Land was wealth. Why would the priestly caste ever institute or allow such legislation unless it came from above?

The ordained holidays do not commemorate any historical event—the Passover is the one clear exception—but instead are almost entirely lacking in historical content. However, nations do not establish undefined holidays. No one would embrace them.

For instance, the purpose for the “Feast of Trumpets” was never specified. Therefore, the rabbis invented a meaning for it. They called the day, “Rosh Hashanah” (the head of the year) or “New Year’s Day.” How strange not to know the significance of one’s holidays. Had they been humanly ordained, there never would have been any question.

Holidays commemorate past events. Characteristically, all of Israel's *nondivinely* ordained holidays are commemorative. *Hanukkah* commemorates the cleansing of the temple and the Maccabean military victories. *Purim* commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people in Persia. *T'sha b'Av* commemorates the destruction of the temple. *Simchat Torah* commemorates the giving of the Law on Sinai.

Similarly, we assign dates to occasions we want to remember — dates that serve to define us as a nation. Not so the Torah. There is no assignment of a date to the giving of the law, to any military victories or momentous defeats (such as Pearl Harbor Day). There is no "Victory over Jericho" day or "Pharaoh's Defeat in the Red Sea" day. Instead, it seems that these dates are important to God, perhaps even prophetic.

The Law placed everyone under the curse of death. "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out" (Deut. 27:26). Ordinarily, we humans would not accept such a damning religion. Nor would the rabbis, who qualified this teaching in several ways! For instance, Rabbi Gerald Sigal wrote,

[Deuteronomy 27:26] does not refer to the breaking of the Law by an ordinary individual. It is, as the rabbis explain, a reference to the authorities in power who fail to enforce the rule of the Law in the land of Israel (Talmud—J. T. Sotah 7:4). The leadership of the nation is thus charged, under pain of the curse, to set the tone for the nation and make the Law the operative force in the life of the nation.⁶

Instead, this verse damns every Israelite, as do so many other verses (Exod. 20:6; 23:21–22; 24:3; Lev. 26:14–16; Deut. 5:29; 6:24–25; 8:1; 10:12; 11:8, 26–28, 32; 12:28). For this reason, the Psalms repeatedly inform Israel that their *only* hope was in the mercy of God (Psalm 143:2; 32:1–5; 130:3–8).

Consistent with this, there is no verse in the OT that applauds Israel in a manner such as: "You Israelites are doing a great job! Keep up the good work!" Instead, the OT is consistently degrading.

Humanly speaking, the Torah's teaching is so humanly degrading and so counter to our agendas that anyone who wanted to gain a following would *never* invent such a religion. Instead, we humans gravitate to a religion for its benefits and *not* its curses.

Meanwhile, the DH ascribes the OT to human devices and self-serving manipulations. However, we find the very opposite in the pages of the OT — a religion

that humans would not invent. Instead, it appears that we are looking at a divinely given Book—the very thing that it has always insisted on.

Daniel Mann has taught at the New York School of the Bible since 1992 and is the author of *Embracing the Darkness: How a Jewish, Sixties, Berkeley Radical Learned to Live with Depression, God's Way*. He blogs at: www.MannsWord.blogspot.com.

NOTES

- 1 Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 110.
- 2 David Klinghoffer, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2006), 215–17.
- 3 <http://wiki.answers.com/Q/>.
- 4 <http://www.jewfaq.org/origins.htm>.
- 5 http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/361874/jewish/Abraham.htm.
- 6 Gerald Sigal, *The Jew and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House: 1981).