



STATEMENT DW035

**A Summary Critique:  
Who Wrote the Bible?  
Richard E. Friedman  
(Summit Books, 1987)**

Hundreds of books are published each year concerning the historical origins and authorship of the Old Testament. What, then, is so significant about this book? It has captured the attention of the American secular media as few books in the field of biblical criticism ever have. Lengthy articles on the book have appeared in such magazines as *U.S. News and World Report* and such newspapers as *The Wall Street Journal*. The most sensational aspect of the book, written by Dr. Richard E. Friedman of the University of California at San Diego, is his suggestion that a woman wrote certain parts of the Old Testament, and this may be the main reason for the attention it has received. But the real significance of the book is that it is popularizing the “Documentary Hypothesis,” a theory originating in the 18th and 19th centuries which denies that Moses wrote the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and which claims to find four major documents (J, E, P, and D), dating from after the reigns of David and Solomon, woven together in the Pentateuch.

This special *SUMMARY CRITIQUE* is written by Dr. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Dr. Archer earned his Ph.D. at Harvard University, along with a B.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. He is best known for his books *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Moody Press, 1964) and *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Zondervan, 1982). He is therefore eminently qualified to review a book on Old Testament criticism.

The author of this book is a typical product of the Liberalism of the nineteenth century, brought up on Wellhausen’s Documentary Hypothesis, and carefully screened from acquaintance with any type of scholarship that disagrees with the so-called “settled results of modern scholarship.” Not a single conservative scholar is mentioned in the entire book, and he seems to be totally unaware that any educated thinker could disagree with the Liberal Establishment. On page 28 he declares: “At present, however, there is hardly a biblical scholar in the world actively working on the problem who would claim that the Five Books of Moses were written by Moses — or by anyone person.” A footnote condescendingly adds:

There are many persons who claim to be biblical scholars. I refer to scholars who have the necessary training in languages, biblical archeology, and literary and historical skills to work on the problem, and who meet, discuss, and debate their ideas and research with other scholars through scholarly journals, conferences, etc. (p. 261).

This seems to suggest that anyone who does not adhere to the Documentary Hypothesis is misguided and does not deserve to be regarded as a scholar at all. True scholarship is thus restricted to those who screen themselves off from all contrary evidence and dogmatically content themselves with repeating arguments long since refuted by well informed and superbly trained products of the foremost universities in America. But this kind of subjective bias hardly deserves a rating of authentic scholarship at all. A true scholar is one who is perfectly willing to listen to those who disagree with his own position, making every effort to understand them without resorting to caricature, and who then proceeds to a fair and careful analysis of the fallacies which appear in their line of reasoning in the light of the objective evidences.

The fact is that there are Old Testament specialists who have been trained in schools like Harvard and Princeton and Chicago University, who have received earned doctorates, who have become skilled in all of the relevant languages and archeological discoveries, who have attended and participated in all of the leading scholarly conventions, and who have authored texts that are studied by college and seminary students all over the world, who still adhere to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The whole structure of the Documentary Hypothesis is so vitiated with obscurantism and circular reasoning on the basis of unproved

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and unprovable hypotheses that it hardly deserves the status of true scholarship at all. It appears rather to be an exercise in biased subjectivism that shuns any serious consideration of conflicting evidence.

There remains one other preliminary observation to be made concerning this book. Since the basic conclusion of the author is that the Bible is nothing more than a human literary production, with no divine authority behind it, it becomes quite doubtful whether the Bible should be taken seriously. If Friedman is right, the Bible is basically a fraud. It purports to be a record of special revelation from God, disclosing the true purpose of life and the meaning of human experience. It claims to explain to us the moral law ordained by God, the nature of our guilt, and His loving provision of a Savior who came to pay the penalty for our sin and to deliver us from its power. But if, as Dr. Friedman implies, the Lord God has never spoken to man, and all the biblical references to His having done so are nothing but lies, then there is no religious value in such a tissue of deception and fraud as the Bible turns out to be.

Proceeding from these preliminary observations to the proper business of a book reviewer, we come to the narrower question of whether our author has handled his theme with integrity in the light of his own presuppositions. How well has he handled his subject within the limits of his own agenda? Has he contributed anything new that has not been said before? He obviously feels that he has something new and important to say, and in some ways it seems true that he has seriously rattled the cage of classical Wellhausianism, even though he remains basically true to its view of the Old Testament. As such, the book is worth reading, despite its consistent obscurantism in regard to modern conservative scholarship, and despite its tendency to resort to vague generalities and exceedingly sparse documentation.

The earlier chapters consist largely of a rather glib rehash of the old standard arguments which date back to J.G. Eichhorn two centuries ago, and were carried on by De Wette, Graf, and Wellhausen. (For some strange reason neither Hermann Hupfeld nor Abraham Kuenen is mentioned by name, even though they played such an important role in constructing the Documentary Hypothesis.) The criteria of alleged contradictions and discrepancies, familiar in all of the traditional introductions written by Driver, Pfeiffer, and Eissfeldt, are run through without any notice of the refutations furnished by learned scholars of Europe and America over the last century. It is clear that he has been reading only those authors who toe the Wellhausian line with undeviating fidelity. There is never an indication that men of great learning and acumen, like Franz Delitzsch, E.W. Hengstenberg, Friedrich Keil, Joseph Addison Alexander, William Henry Green, Carl Paul Caspari, Heinrich Hahn, Rudolf Stier, Wilhelm Moeller, Robert Dick Wilson (master of forty-five languages), Edward J. Young, or Ronald K. Harrison, ever lived or wrote.

The repeated refutation of Wellhausen's allegations of error in the Hebrew historical records furnished by archeological discoveries during the last one hundred years is scarcely noticed. He says nothing of the findings of W.F. Albright concerning the astonishing accuracy of the historical data in the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets, nor of the demolition of Wellhausen's reconstruction of Hebrew history as contained in Kenneth Kitchen's *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament*. That noted Egyptologist of the University of Liverpool summarized his findings as follows:

The theories current in Old Testament studies, however brilliantly conceived and elaborated were mainly established in a vacuum with little or no reference to the Ancient Near East, and initially too often in accordance with *a priori* philosophical and literary principles p. 172).

There is scarcely space in a review of this sort to deal with the many and various traditional arguments for multiple sources and late date of composition for the Pentateuch which Friedman adduces with debonair confidence throughout his review of the development of the Documentary Hypothesis, as if they had never been overthrown and thoroughly refuted by the conservative scholars mentioned above. Suffice it to say that the indications in the Pentateuch of a pre-Conquest time of composition of the books of Moses are altogether compelling. The references to Palestine in those five books are all of hearsay character, indicating a carefully preserved oral tradition retained by an emigrant people dwelling in a foreign land, namely Egypt.

For example, in Genesis 13:10, where Lot is considering which territory to choose for his cattle to graze in, he looks with favor upon the Jordan plain, which is described as being "like the land of Egypt as you go unto Zoar" (a fertile district in the Delta). According to Friedman this passage was composed by "J," at least five centuries after Israel had settled in Canaan. But why should the readers of Genesis have to be told what the Jordan Valley looked like after they had already been occupying it for 500 years? And why should they have to visualize it in terms of a region in Egypt? There is no other way to explain this except on the supposition that both the writer and his readers were personally acquainted with Egypt, but not with Palestine. Or again, in Genesis 33:18 the reference is made to Shalem, "a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan." Why should the readers have to be told that Shechem was in the land of Canaan 500 years after it had been taken over as a capital in the tribe of Ephraim? Or again, in Numbers 13:22 the city of Hebron is said to have been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. Obviously the readers were more familiar with the date of Zoan's founding than with Hebron's — even though Hebron had served as the capital of the

tribe of Judah for several centuries before “J” was allegedly written in Judah itself. It is difficult to see how anyone can come to any other conclusion in the light of these evidences but that Genesis and the Pentateuch in general were composed prior to Israel’s settlement in Canaan.

So far as Deuteronomy is concerned, the internal evidence points unmistakably to the eve of the Conquest as the time of its composition. If we consider the implications of Moses’ instructions to his people as recorded in Deuteronomy 13 and 17 we cannot avoid this conclusion. In these two chapters we find the death penalty prescribed for any individual, family, or community that became involved in idol-worship. In the time of Josiah, or even in the time of Hezekiah, there was scarcely a community in all of the kingdom of Judah that was not infected with idolatry. Had such a law been propounded and carried out with rigor, it is safe to say that at least 50 percent of the total population would have been stoned to death. No school of prophets or priests would ever have ventured to propound such severe measures as these and pretend that they originated with Moses himself. The *Sitz im Leben* implied by these passages in Deuteronomy fits only a time in the history of Israel when the entire nation was committed to the worship of Yahweh alone. There is no known period which fits into this framework but the time of Moses and Joshua.

The same is true of Deuteronomy 12:2-4, which mandates the destruction and total obliteration of every idolatrous temple, shrine, or altar throughout the length and breadth of the land of Canaan. A program of this sort predicated an overwhelming superiority of the Israelite armed forces, for the idolatrous populations would certainly have put up the fiercest resistance to the total destruction of their religious centers. At what other time in the history of Israel was the Hebrew military power capable of achieving this goal? With the possible exception of the reigns of David and Solomon, there is no other point in history when this could have been accomplished but in the time of Joshua (of whom it is recorded in the book of Joshua that he never lost a battle except for the episode at Ai). Here again, the only setting that fits for such a stern and unsparing mandate is the time of the Conquest. Never afterward, from the time of the Judges onward, would it ever have been conceivable that the Hebrew armies could have carried out such an assignment. To disregard such factors is to abandon all pretensions of dating a work of literature on the basis of internal evidence (as Friedman and the Documentarian critics have always claimed to be doing), and to locate the composition of a document in a setting completely unsuited to it. It is simply unthinkable that either Hezekiah or Josiah (to say nothing of Zerubbabel or Ezra, as Gustaf Hoelscher maintained with his theory of a post-exilic date for Deuteronomy) could entertain the notion that, at a time when Judah was a vassal nation to Babylon or Assyria or Persia, it was capable of wiping out idol-worship throughout Palestine. For the Hebrew state in those days it was merely a matter of surviving as a free people.

So far as social and economic conditions are concerned, the internal evidence of the text of Deuteronomy definitely points to a period of composition much earlier than the time of the Divided Monarchy. As George Mendenhall of the University of Michigan points out in *Law and Covenant in Israel*:

It is hard to conceive of a law code which could be more at variance from what we know of Canaanite culture than the Covenant Code (Exod. 21-23 JE)...The Canaanite cities were predominantly commercial, rigidly stultified in social structure....The Covenant Code shows no social stratification, for the slaves mentioned are not members of the community, with the single exception of the daughter who is sold as an amah or slave-wife (who is herself strongly protected by law . . . . The laws of the Covenant Code reflect the customs, morality, and religious obligations of the Israelite community (or perhaps some specific Israelite community of the North) before the monarchy....since it exhibits just that mixture of case-law and apodictic law.... which we find in covenants from Hittite sources and in Mesopotamian codes as well: any study which assumes that it is a later, artificial composite from originally independent literary sources may be assigned rather to rational ingenuity than to historic fact (pp. 13-14).

Mendenhall goes on to suggest that the pentateuchal legislation may have arisen subsequently to the Conquest because they have in view a sedentary agricultural population rather than a roving desert population. Yet it must be observed that from the standpoint of the live situation presented by the prologue of Deuteronomy the whole purpose of the legislation is to set up guidelines for a nation which is very shortly to cease its wandering and take over possession of the agricultural areas of Canaan. At this juncture, therefore, it would have been pointless to limit the purview of the code to desert conditions. At any rate, it seems passing strange that Friedman would have totally ignored Mendenhall’s work in his dating of Deuteronomy, even though he lists his book in his bibliography.

As to Friedman’s argument that Deuteronomy must have been composed by Jeremiah or his amanuensis Baruch (to whom he credits also Joshua, Judges, and Samuel as the final portions of the so-called Octateuch, or “eight books,” including Genesis through Samuel), he follows the familiar Documentarian line of reasoning that Jeremiah’s authorship is strongly indicated by the frequency with which terms and phrases used in the prophecies of Jeremiah occur in Deuteronomy itself. However, by this line of reasoning one could prove that Milton or Bunyan was the author of the King James Version of the Bible, because they too contain so many expressions in their literary compositions which were also found in the Authorized Version. Friedman completely

overlooks the familiar pattern of influence exerted by the holy books of any culture upon the language and phraseology of later authors who belong to that tradition.

Moreover, he fails to observe the extreme unlikelihood that the Samaritan sect would have refused canonicity to the book of Joshua, as they did (along with all other books besides the Pentateuch), had it been composed at the same time as the final recension of the Pentateuch. It is hardly conceivable that a book which featured the career of the great tribal hero of Ephraim would have been rejected by the Ephraimites and their Samaritan descendants had it been contemporaneously published with Genesis through Deuteronomy. The prominence given to Mount Gerizim in Joshua 8 would surely have been sufficient to warrant its inclusion had it been available.

In the light of these considerations, the objective evidence of the text and of all pertinent historical records bearing upon the career of Israel leads us back to the genuineness of the Mosaic date as the only plausible period for the composition of the Pentateuch. The Wellhausen hypothesis as recycled by Friedman must be perceived as an exercise in subjectivism rather than a scientific treatment of the objective data bearing upon the date of the composition of the Pentateuch. The whole concept of differing recensions of the Mosaic tradition, a J-document originating in Judah and an E-document developed in the Northern Kingdom, has in this century been called into serious question by disillusioned Wellhausians like Wilhelm Moeller, B.D. Eerdmans, Johannes Pedersen, and Ivan Engnell, all of whom completely reject the whole Documentary Hypothesis as an artificial, modern occidental type of interpretation totally unsuited and irrelevant to ancient Semitic literature. It seems to me very strange that Dr. Friedman takes absolutely no notice of these eminent scholars in Germany, Holland, and Scandinavia, as if nothing has happened since Wellhausen published his *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* in 1878.

Yet for all of his dutiful adherence to the well-trodden track of traditional Wellhausenism, our author takes a very surprising change of direction when he comes to Chapter 9: "A Brilliant Mistake" (pp.161-73). He advances a strong argument for redating the so-called Priestly Code to a period prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. On p. 186 (in Chapter 10) he stoutly affirms: "P had to be written before the first Temple was destroyed." He follows this up with a devastating question: "Why would a priest write a law code that said that sacrifices can only be offered at a place that did not exist any more?" He goes on to affirm (p. 187) that the Documentarian critics since the time of Edward Reuss in 1833 had been grossly in error when they dated the Priestly code at least a century and a half too late (i.e., in the time of Ezra, ca. 450 B.C.).

In support of this position he points out that Jeremiah in fact quoted from Genesis 1:2 (a section assigned to P) when he said, "I looked at the earth, and here it was unformed and void, and to the heavens, and their light was gone" (Jer. 4:23). Friedman, in fact, claims that Jeremiah expresses hostility to P because of its emphasis on sacrifices by his observation in 7:37: "For I did not speak with your fathers and I did not command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt about matters of offering and sacrifice." Actually, all Jeremiah is saying in this passage is that the mandate to obey the words of the Lord was announced to Israel at an earlier time in the Exodus (Ex. 19) than the revelations of the sacrificial system which came to Moses in Exodus 27-30. But be that as it may, the fact remains that the post-Exilic date of P, which had become since Abraham Kuenen in 1859 one of the "surest results of modern scholarship," must now be abandoned. The Priestly Code should be considered as prior to Jeremiah (whose career began around 628 B.C.) rather than subsequent to the return from Babylon in 537 B.C.

On page 164 he raises a very obvious objection: "How could this writer [i.e., Mr. P] compose a story in which God gives Moses laws about a Temple when no Temple was actually built until over two hundred years after Moses was dead?" He then goes on to discredit the Wellhausen dictum that the Tabernacle never really existed, but was only a fiction, a symbol of the second Temple (p. 164). In the subsequent pages he casts serious doubt upon Wellhausen's solution to P's failure to teach centralization of worship in any explicit fashion; Wellhausen had argued that after the return from Exile everyone would understand that they could only sacrifice at the Jerusalem temple. This could not be the case, Friedman points out, since Jeremiah did in fact refer to the Priestly sacrificial system as having been composed prior to his own time.

In conclusion, it might be appropriate to suggest that if Friedman had ventured to test out some of the other incredibilities of the Documentary Hypothesis, he might well have been driven to abandon it altogether. After all, as we have shown earlier, it is really impossible to defend in the light of the internal evidence of the text itself and the known facts of history. An objective and truly scientific handling of the evidence can only lead to the conclusion that Jesus Christ and the New Testament apostles were absolutely correct in assuming the genuineness of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (cf. Matt, 19:8; Mark 12: 26; John 5:46-47: 7:19; Acts 3:22).

— Gleason L. Archer, Jr.