

# Long Ago God Spoke to our Fathers by the Prophets...

What the Old Testament is, what it says, how to think about it, and why it matters

## **Part I: Material & Composition**

### I. Introduction

- A. We will provide an overview of the material elements related to the composition & formation of the Old Testament, then discuss how this shapes our understanding of inspiration.
- B. You should be familiar with
  - 1. Overall structure of the Old Testament
  - 2. Key events in history of Israel
  - 3. Important textual witnesses
  - 4. What JEDP means

### II. Sources & Recommendations

#### A. Books

- 1. *The Pentateuch As Narrative* by John Sailhammer
- 2. *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism* by Paul D. Wegner
- 3. ***Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* by John Walton\***
- 4. *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* ed. Christopher Hays
- 5. *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context* by John Walton
- 6. *Introduction to the Old Testament* by R.K. Harrison (*note: this is a bit outdated, but an excellent review of OT studies up to 1970*)
- 7. ***The Unseen Realm* by Michael S. Heiser\***
- 8. Pritchard's *The Ancient Near East Anthology*
- 9. *Lost World Series* by John Walton

#### B. Podcasts & Other Multimedia

- 1. **The Naked Bible Podcast by Michael S. Heiser\***
- 2. **The Bible Project\***
- 3. Sentinel Apologetics
- 4. *Discovering the Old Testament* by Sheldon Graves
- 5. Reformed Theological Seminary (tons of stuff)
- 6. *The Bible for Normal People* (use with caution, Pete Enns is a bit crazy)

### III. Key Historical Events

Year	Event	Scriptural description
13.8 bya	Big bang	Gen 1:1
2000 B.C.	Call of Abraham	Gen 12
1446/1270 BC*	The exodus, here there be dragons. Controversy abounds as to the historicity of the exodus and the dating	Exodus, <i>Prince of Egypt</i>
Exodus + 40 years	Mt. Sinai	Exodus, Lev, Num, Deut
1050 - 930 BC	United Monarchy	Samuel

884-873 BC	Reign of Omri, first king to appear explicitly by name in external sources	1 Kings 16
640-609 BC	Reign of Josiah + Deuteronomic reforms	2 Kings 22-23
586-515 BC	Babylonian Exile	2 Kings 24ff, 2 Chron, Prophets
515 BC - 70 AD	Second Temple period, beginning with the return of the exiles to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD by Roman Empire	Last decades covered in New Testament

#### IV. Text of the Tanakh

##### A. Masoretic Text (MT)

1. Primary textual basis of modern Bibles
2. Hebrew
3. Transmission through the Masoretes ca. 800-1000 A.D.

##### B. Septuagint (LXX)

1. Greek translation of Tanakh, commissioned ca 250 BC
2. Primary text of the early Christians
3. Quotations in New Testament usually take the LXX form, e.g. Heb 10:5/ Psalm 40:6

##### C. Dead Sea Scrolls aka Qumran Texts (DSS/QT)

1. Collection of scrolls discovered in the caves of Qumran in the 1940s

##### D. Samaritan Pentateuch

1. Background: Samaritans split from the Judeans, primarily over the issue of worshipping at Mt. Gerizim (instead of Mt. Moriah)
2. Samaritan canon is only Pentateuch (Gen-Deut), later books rejected
3. Readings favor proto-MT versions, usually agrees with the LXX & Qumran texts

#### V. Editorial Activity & the Documentary Hypothesis

##### A. What does the Bible say about its composition?

1. Jeremiah 36: "In the fourth year of Jehoi'akim the son of Josi'ah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Take a scroll and **write on it all the words that I have spoken** to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, **from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josi'ah until today [about 30 years]**. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I intend to do to them, so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neri'ah, and **Baruch wrote upon a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words** of the Lord which he had spoken to him.
2. Sections like Jeremiah 36 attest to composite authorship. The book of Jeremiah is compiled by Baruch, including both the oracles of Jeremiah and the narrative sections about Jeremiah's life.

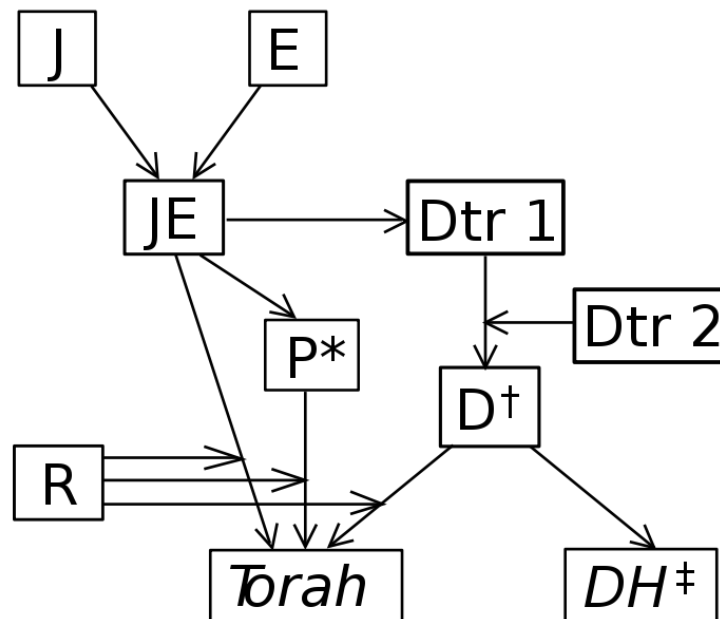
##### B. Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch?

1. "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" - Moses
2. "Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is." - Moses

##### C. Evidence of editorial activity in the Bible

1. Obvious post-de-facto notations
  - a) "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses" - Deut 34:10
  - b) "...to this day" - numerous
  - c) Songs embedded into narrative (eg. Judges 6, Deut 32)

2. Alteration of laws for post-Mosaic contexts
    - a) Exodus 21:1-6 // Deuteronomy 15:12-18
  3. Different cultural contexts
    - a) Gen 1-11, Mesopotamian/Babylonian
    - b) Exodus, Egyptian
- D. Julius Wellhausen
1. Enshrined previous source criticism attempts, mostly Graf's work, into the documentary hypothesis aka Graf-Wellhausen
  2. Notable work: Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels (1878)
- E. Basics of the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis
1. Pentateuch is an exilic product an edited compilation of four, non-contemporary authors: Jahwist, Elohist, Priest, and Deuteronomist aka JEDP
    - a) Jahwist used YHWH for God
    - b) Elohist used Elohim for God
    - c) Priest supplemented with cultic particulars
    - d) Deuteronomist wrote Deuteronomy during Josiah's reign
  2. Israel's religion evolved from a simple, free religion to a highly structured, centralized religion.



- J:** Jahwist source (7th c BCE)  
**E:** Elohist source (late 9th century BCE)  
**Dtr1:** early (7th century BCE) historian  
**Dtr2:** later (6th century BCE) historian  
**P\*:** Priestly source (6th/5th c BCE)  
**D†:** Deuteronomist source (mostly Deuteronomy)  
**R:** redactor  
**DH:** Deuteronomistic history (books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings)

F. Challenges to Graf-Wellhausen

1. The usage of YHWH & Elohim is variegated more than G-W predicts. This is evident in the LXX and DSS. Since Wellhausen was only working with the MT, future textual discoveries undercut the initial analysis
2. The Ras Shamra texts show religious activity contemporaneous with ancient Israelites more complex and evolved than Wellhausen predicted. Again, these texts were discovered after Wellhausen's death.
3. Samaritan traditions place the Judite/Samaritan split in the 11th c. BCE. If this is the case, the Pentateuch reached final form long before the exile. It should be noted that these traditions are not widely accepted.

VI. Wrap-Up

- A. We have taken an overview of the structure of the Tanakh, some important events related to its formation, key textual witnesses, and scholarly theories.
- B. Takeaways
  1. The Tanakh is complicated and far from homogenous
  2. The Tanakh is rooted in its ANE culture (more next week!)
  3. Key texts: DSS, MT, LXX, SP

## Part II: Concepts & Context

### I. Introduction

#### A. Key points for this week

1. Context is bigger than material witness
2. Parallel  $\neq$  Plagiarism
3. Modern labels of polytheism, henotheism, monotheism do not accurately capture ancient Israelite theology

#### B. What does it mean to take the Bible "in context"?

1. Internal context: word, verse, chapter, author's corpus, related books, etc. For example, what do Paul and James mean by the word πίστις?
2. External context: archaeology, history, geography, original language, etc.
3. Cognitive environment: ideas, customs, imagery, myths, etc in the authors' lives. In other words, what other material is the present work hooking into?

### II. Cognitive Environments

#### A. Modern Example: Political Cartoons

1. These comics make the same conceptual point (i.e. Mitt Romney isn't a true, conservative Republican). The animal imagery is multilayered and not immediately obvious to someone outside the cognitive environment (i.e. early 21st century American politics).



#### B. Modern Example: John's Attack Helicopters

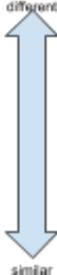
1. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like **crowns of gold**, and their faces **resembled human faces**. Their hair was like women's hair, and their **teeth were like lions' teeth**. They had breastplates like **breastplates of iron**, and the sound of their wings was like the **thundering of many horses** and chariots rushing into battle. They had **tails with stingers, like scorpions**, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. - Revelation 9:7-10



#### C. Okay fine, what's the point?

1. The Bible is not a self-contained work but, like most works of literature, leaves many things implicit and assumes the reader is in the same cognitive environment
2. The implicit details are going to be filled in by your assumptions, so, make them good ones!

### III. Comparative Studies

- A. What is the Bible's cognitive environment?
  1. **Ancient Near East (most of Tanakh)\***
  2. Second Temple Judaism (most of New Testament)
  3. Roman occupied Hellenistic states (most of Paul's letters)
- B. Properly Analyzing the Cognitive Environment
  1. Read/familiarize yourself with the intellectual output of the related people groups.
  2. Evaluate parallels for (dis)similarity to extract author's communication.
  3. Apologetic application: most objections take the form that since the Biblical account is similar to another account, that means it's plagiarism. This is demonstrably false.
- C. Contextual Spectrum
  1. Parallel  $\neq$  Plagiarism! There is a spectrum from different to similar. (Walton, ANEOT)
    - a) Totally ignores and presents different view
    - b) Hazy familiarity leading to caricature and ridicule
    - c) Accurate knowledge resulting in rejection
    - d) Disagreement resulting in polemics, debate, or contention
    - e) Awareness leading to adaptation or transformation
    - f) Conscious imitation or borrowing
    - g) Subconscious shared heritage
  2. Principles of Comparative Studies
    - a) Similarities AND differences must be assessed
    - b) Parallelism  $\neq$  plagiarism
    - c) Surface similarities  $\neq$  conceptual congruence
    - d) Cultures are not homogenous and resist reductionism
    - e) Transmission channel between groups must be identified\*
      - (1) biological analogy: convergent evolution

### IV. The Divine Council

- A. Ras Shamra / Ugarit Texts
  1. Ancient cuneiform discovered 1928 in Ugarit (Ras Shamra) and Ras Ibn Hani in Syria.
  2. Ugaritic, an otherwise unknown Northwest Semitic language, highly similar to proto-Hebrew
  3. ~ 1,500 texts & fragments discovered so far containing religious works, notably related to Ba'al
  4. Dated between 13th-12th c BCE, contemporaneous with ancient Israel
- B. Ugaritic Divine Council
  1. Throughout the ANE, different cultures utilized a similar conceptual structure of a divine council. In Ugarit, Israel's neighbors to the north, the divine council was run by the supreme god El and his subordinate co-regent Ba'al. The next tier included the sons of El followed by the messenger gods (malakim).
- C. Hebrew Divine Council
  1. Psalm 82
    - a) God (**elohim**) has taken his place in the **divine council**; in the midst of the gods (**elohim**) he holds judgment: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah* Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."
  2. Psalm 89
    - a) Let the heavens praise thy wonders, O Lord, thy faithfulness in the **assembly of the holy ones!** For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among **the heavenly beings** is like the Lord, a God **feared in the council of the holy ones**, great and terrible above all that are round about him? O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as thou art, O Lord, with thy faithfulness round

about thee?

3. 1 Kings 22

- a) Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and **all the host of heaven standing beside him** on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.' And the Lord said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go forth and do so.' Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has spoken evil concerning you.

4. Deuteronomy 32

- a) Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you. When **the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance**, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples **according to the number of the sons of God**. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

5. Job 1

- a) Now there was a day when **the sons of God came to present themselves** before the Lord, and the satan also came among them. The Lord said to the satan, "Whence have you come?" the satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

6. Job 38

- a) "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the **sons of God** shouted for joy?

7. Systematic Summary

- a) God creates the universe (Gen 1) while the council watches and praises (Gen 1:26, Job 38:7). Members of the divine council rebel (Gen 6:1-4) leading to the corruption of humanity which God judges with a flood (Gen 7). The nations collaborate to rebel against the authority of God and make themselves gods. God rejects this rebellion by disinheriting humanity and assigning them divine rulers (Gen 11, Ps 82, Dt 32). These rulers are corrupt and God vows to reclaim the nations into God's family through the nation of Israel.

D. Responses

1. Due to the fear of polytheism, many interpreters have opted for alternative accounts of divine plurality including (but not limited to): the Trinity, human judges, angels
2. Others surmise these passages are vestigial remnants of Israel's polytheistic past.
3. Assessment: alternative interpretations are universally weak, but the polytheistic evolution hypothesis extrapolates too far beyond the data.

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