

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adult Bible Equipping Class
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OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

Understanding Higher Criticism

Introduction

As we arrive at the midpoint in our study through the OT, we have an opportunity to investigate a matter that has surfaced in practically every study and has had a global impact on the world's perception of the Bible and its historical reliability. The topic, of course, is *higher criticism*.

At the outset, it's important to clarify what we mean by "criticism," since this term tends to elicit negative associations in the minds of most conservative Christians. The term itself is rather neutral, in fact, and comes from a Greek term that simply means to "separate, distinguish," or "judge." As Archer explains, "In contradistinction to higher criticism, which deals with questions of the authorship and integrity of the text of Bible books, the science of lower criticism (or textual criticism) is concerned with the task of restoring the original text on the basis of the various copies which have been preserved to us."¹ Legitimately applied, criticism is a useful tool in biblical studies. As Soggin observes, the problem with biblical criticism isn't the *criticism* but rather the *critic*—either because of his staunch refusal to utilize it as a tool, or his over-excitement to use it as if we were incapable of understanding the Scriptures without it:

Nor is there any need to go to the opposite extreme: to believe that biblical criticism provides the solution to the majority of problems inherent in the texts. This, too, is an emotional position like its opposite, a position which forgets that the synagogue and the church have read the texts in question for millennia without criticism and have succeeded in capturing the essential part of their message without its help. Thus today we accept biblical criticism simply as one of the many instruments which science has put at our disposal, as biblical scholars, without either unjustified pessimism or exaggerated enthusiasm—and we make use of it with gratitude, and at the same time with freedom.²

Biblical criticism is one of those tools which, when wielded with humility, proves quite useful. However, in the hands of the arrogant skeptic, such a tool becomes a weapon to attack the very

¹ Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 57.

² Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., trans. John Bowden, OTL (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 34.

Bible itself. That is what we see in the development of higher criticism, and it's a tale that began over 500 years ago.

While the lay Christian may perceive the issue as one for the "theologians" and "scholars" of the church, he or she may be quite unaware of just how great an impact higher criticism has had in popular culture and how much higher critical thought has encroached into everyday life. Popular magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*, as well as television channels such as *Discover* and *The History Channel* display not only a blatant acceptance of higher critical conclusions, but even a desire to indoctrinate the public with increasing amounts of skepticism.

So is this a field for the theologians, for the scholars, for the ivory towers of the church? Armerding insists it cannot be:

The issues persist today. They affect not only the evangelical scholar seeking to preserve viewpoints which radically separate him from his more liberal colleagues, but virtually every student of the OT as well. University lectureships are given on the basis of adherence to critical thought, and textbooks are judged by the extent to which they affirm the current brand of critical orthodoxy, while popular television programs disseminate the latest theories to the waiting masses.³

To complicate matters further, Barrick notes that evangelicals have been far too accommodating to higher critical ideas:

Year by year evangelical scholars continue to give up valuable ground to liberal biblical critics by adopting their methodologies. Evangelicals attempt to baptize such theories in evangelical waters without realizing that those methodologies have never been converted. Pressured by publishers and "Christian" academia, evangelicals borrow the cloak of critical terminology to clothe their work. While there are valuable kernels of truth buried within contemporary critical studies, evangelicals must take great care to irradiate the material with the unadulterated Word of God so as not to become infected with the Trojan virus that saturates its thinking.⁴

This study is a brief overview of what higher criticism is, where it came from, and what impact it has had on OT studies. The goal is to equip the lay person to be able to identify higher critical thinking, expose its underlying assumptions, and respond with biblical truth.

The Historical Development of Higher Criticism

Whether you look at the OT books or even extra-biblical writings, it is quite clear that there was little concern about providing detailed information about the origin and source of a text. True, most of the OT prophets at least identified themselves as the author of their respective works, but the historical books completely lack any kind of documentation of time, place, author, and occasion.

This, of course, mattered little to the ancients, as the concept of "intellectual/creative property" was a concept foreign to Jewish thinking until its introduction sometime in the Hellenistic peri-

³ Carl E. Armerding, *The Old Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 2.

⁴ William D. Barrick, "Old Testament Introduction," unpublished class syllabus (Sun Valley, CA: The Master's Seminary, 2009), 33.

od.⁵ What mattered, as Merrill clarifies, was the message itself and not “who wrote it and for what purpose.”⁶

In fact, it was the canonical process that first spurred Jewish scholars to investigate the source of a text considered for inclusion in the canon. “Hence, Jewish tradition, first oral and then written, advanced arguments and evidences to establish actual authorship and other compositional details for all parts of the OT collection that hitherto lacked such information. In this manner the first tentative steps were taken toward what would eventually be known as “the historical-critical method,” i.e., historical criticism.

Up to the time of the Enlightenment, attacks against the Scripture, whether OT or NT, came from *outside* the religious community (whether Jewish or Christian) as attempts to undercut the Scripture’s claim as a divine book and thus discredit Judaism and Christianity. Nevertheless, the 2,000 years of Jewish and Christian history saw univocal assent to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

But with the Age of Reason came a philosophical skepticism that showed no sacred bounds. As man began to discover the power of the human mind, he began to wield secular reason and scientific methodology as an authority independent from everything else and the standard by which all truth was judged.

The fruit of rationalism became clear by the 19th century. Scientific advancements seemed to validate rationalism and the scientific method, leading to even greater development of these methods in applications outside the realm of science. The dialectical philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel, which saw all of history as a slow development and melding of ideas from simple to complicated, eventually gave rise to the social constructs of Karl Marx and the biological postulations of Charles Darwin.⁷

This concept of “developmentalism” and scientific rationality also targeted the Bible. But what differed at this point in history was the impact this skepticism had on the church itself and especially on the academic and theological institutions of the church. For the first time, the church itself began adopting the world’s skepticism so that by the 19th century the theological institutions that fed the church its doctrine were consumed by Enlightenment rationalism, not only in Europe but also in America. As Merrill notes,

The Renaissance and its intellectual legacy had a devastating impact on the Bible, for the scientific method demanded that no point of view, no dogma of the church, was above re-examination to determine whether it met the criteria of rationality and scientific analysis. Judged by such arbitrary standards, the Bible was believed to be invalid with its claims to prophecy, miracles, and the supernatural. Its self-attestation as revelation, its teachings as to its own inspiration, and its accounts of events that stood outside the realms of

⁵ D. G. Meade, *Pseudonimity and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 4.

⁶ Eugene H. Merrill, “The Development of the Historical Critical Method,” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 129.

⁷ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 52.

contemporary experience and empirical investigation rendered the Bible to the skeptic an unbelievable collection of ancient myths and legends.⁸

Driven by the philosophical assertions of Thomas Hobbes and David Hume in England, René Descartes in France, and Gottfried Leibniz in Germany, the church was fueled by the notion that

religion must be traced from below and not from above. That is, the conclusion of the modern scholars is ultimately dependent on the view that religion is a movement from man to God rather than a revelation of God to man. This is the leading *motif* in the modern study of the history of religion, being a product of the application to the study of religion of the New Scientific Method with its rigid evolutionary hypothesis.⁹

Thus, while belief in God was maintained, it was a mystical relationship where reason reigned supreme and what man could know with *certainty* was limited by what he could evaluate by the evidence of his reason. God, naturally, fit outside the box of human reason, and the Bible, naturally, could not be accepted as it had been traditionally—as God’s speech to men. “Either by blatant attack on the Bible or more commonly by ignoring it, skeptics and critics paved the way for a view of Scripture that challenged its authority and questioned time-honored traditions as to its authorship, dating, and literary integrity.”¹⁰

To be fair, the church viewed higher criticism as that which would free the church to worship God divorced from the antiquated notions of pre-Enlightened societies. But it was an empty hope, and the rationalistic clothing adopted by the church was in fact not clothing at all.

The intellectual ground of natural man is a fictitious cosmos in which all truth is first responsible to him, that is, to the sanctity of his private judgment, before he is responsible to it. Any god which might exist, therefore, by virtue of his “might-ness” must subject himself to man for verification. But the Almighty cannot be known in such fiction.

The right of verification from a stance outside, and therefore over, the Word, of verification from the standpoint of one’s own resources, is not common ground but fallen ground. It belongs to man’s fanciful independence and futile attempt to serve as his own reference point.¹¹

The Schools of Higher Criticism

While the same skepticism undergirds all forms of higher criticism, their methods differed in terms of which step of the process they emphasized. John Sailhamer¹² has provided a helpful template for understanding and mapping out the historical development of the text and the relationship that each higher critical school has to the others.

⁸ Ibid., 131.

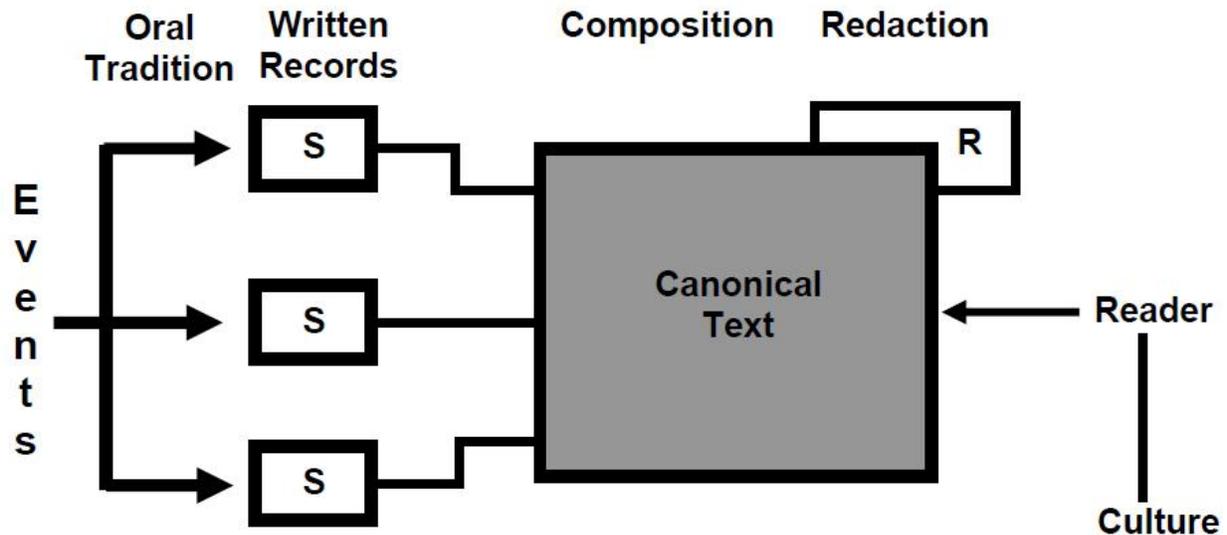
⁹ Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 25.

¹⁰ Merrill, “Historical Critical Method,” 133.

¹¹ Douglas Farrow, *The Word of Truth and Disputes About Words* (Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter Books, 1987), 36, 37.

¹² John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 89-102.

The Sailhamer Template



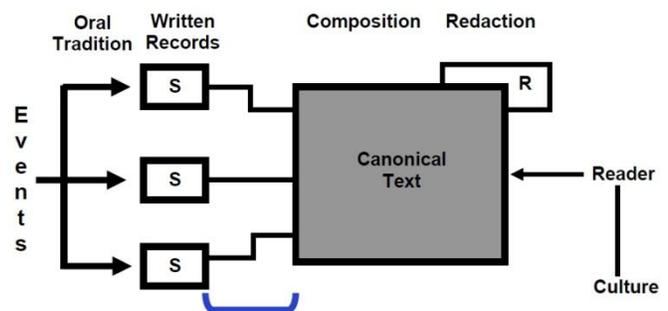
As the map illustrates, higher criticism sees the development of the biblical text as a long process that begins with the occurrence of historical events (not necessarily as described in Scripture) that were handed down through multiple generations as oral traditions until they were finally composed as written records. These records took numerous literary forms (e.g., narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophetic speeches, law sayings, etc.) that were then pieced together into a unified text. These texts underwent numerous redactions (i.e., editions, editing, or reworking) before arriving at their final form. The numerous schools of higher criticism, while distinct, all feed off each other in an interrelated web of studies and assumptions.

Literary Criticism (18th & 19th Centuries)

The basic thrust of literary criticism is to identify what the text was in its *original* shape. To do this, literary critics seek to establish some kind of criteria for determining whether there is unity or disunity in the text.

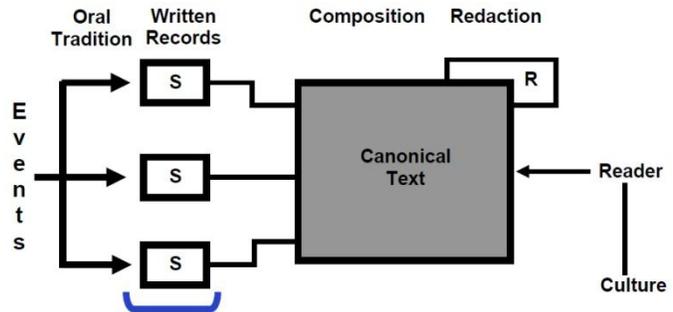
Literary criticism as a whole provides some benefit to biblical studies. It gives us increased awareness of the various forms in the text that help us identify the author's intent. It also draws our attention to whole texts rather than isolating ourselves to partial passages where meaning may be misconstrued. It also helps us understand how the reader's disposition toward the text affects how the text is understood.

Yet the approach is also fraught with difficulties. For one, there is little unity especially among secular literary theorists regarding this approach, and each school of thought develops their own vocabulary, making it difficult for students to derive helpful information. Yet what is most disconcerting is that literary critics have tended to take western modes of thinking and impose them upon ANE literature, all while moving away from the concept of authorial intent.



Source Criticism (18th & 19th Centuries)

The basic concept of source criticism is the attempt to reconstruct from fragments and literary strands the documents that lie behind the present canonical text. It is based upon literary criticism, especially in the Pentateuch.



Source criticism arose out of studies of the Pentateuch. Starting with Jean Astruc, who proposed that Moses authored the Genesis, but did so through the use of written documents which he incorporated together under God's direction. This paved the way for the documentary hypothesis popularized by Julius Wellhausen and William Robertson Smith, who developed a methodology for analyzing the text to identify the fragments of a text and where they came from. Using criteria such as the use of divine names, doublets, linguistic distribution, and divergent ideas (i.e., different theologies), they developed what would be called the JEDP theory, a consensus among scholars that the Pentateuch had four major sources, none by Moses, all dating to the period sometime after David.

Religion—so the prevailing theory went—always progresses from primitive to animism, to pantheism, to polytheism, to henotheism, and finally to monotheism. Moreover, it moves from an intensely personal and private encounter with the divine to an increasingly societal, structured, and hierarchical form in which the individual worshipper recedes in importance and the cult becomes important in its own right. For OT Israel this religious evolutionism meant that the personal though polytheistic faith of the patriarchs gave way to the quasi-monotheism of Moses, which in turn found full expression in the ethical monotheism of the great prophets. From there, however, Israelite religion deteriorated into mere ritual and ceremony at the hands of a professional priesthood, a development that found florescence in the postexilic period. The direct encounter of a human being with his or her God became subverted by a religious hierarchy that operated out of self-interest and placed itself and its cult in a position of mediation.¹³

Merrill goes on to observe,

The conclusions of Wellhausen, while modified here and there in details, have remained to this day the point of departure for pentateuchal studies by liberal scholars. But the objections raised to the hypothesis through archaeological discovery and comparative ANE languages and literatures have created serious problems for scholars who embrace it. The evolutionary premises on which it is based have been totally discredited and even the antiquity of the contents of the documents has had to be reassessed. The result has been the introduction of new methods of investigation that can allow the Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen structure to stand but be invested with new content and meaning.¹⁴

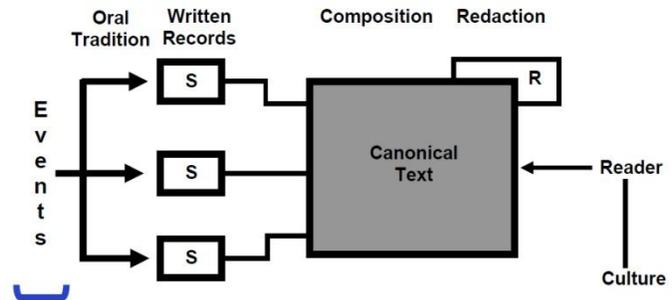
¹³ Merrill, "Historical Critical Method," 137.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Historical Criticism (19th Century)

Historical criticism is the attempt to reconstruct from the canonical text and from any other parallel materials exactly what the *events* were upon which the text was based. It covers three questions:

- (1) What does the text say happened?
- (2) What actually happened?
- (3) What do the theologians and the readers understand happened?



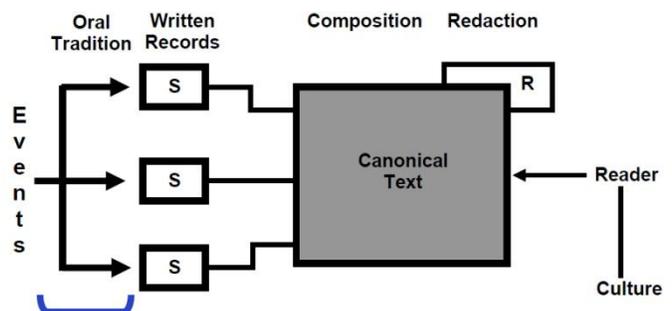
This critical approach uncovers key presuppositions of higher criticism, for it presupposes that the events described in the OT may not really portray the events that occurred in history. To differentiate this, two different words appear in their writings to refer to history. First, there is *historie*, which is real, objective, external, and verifiable events. But there is also *geschichte*, which is subjective, internal, and non-verifiable events. Under the latter category, scholars also coined *heilsgeschichte* to refer to redemptive, salvific, or sacred history.

The point of these terms is that there is real, verifiable history—*historie*—and then there is the history that is reported in Scripture which reflects the theological and religious understanding of the event—*geschichte*. In other words, by considering the historical setting of the document, the time and place in which it was written, its sources, and the events, dates, persons, and places mentioned in the text, historical critics attempted to reconstruct what *really* happened in history from the history presented in the text, which obviously reflected the religious and pre-scientific biases of its authors.

The philosophical principles of such an approach should be immediately apparent. They operated under the assumption that reality is uniform, universal, and accessible to autonomous human reason and investigation. They assume that contemporary human experience can provide the criteria by which the past can be determined, examined, and interpreted. In other words, the present is the key to the past, and once we understand how religious people think, we can deconstruct their portrayal of an event (i.e., God's glory on Mt. Sinai) to understand what really happened (i.e., a severe thunderstorm).

Form Criticism (19th Century)

Form criticism focuses on the forms in which humans typically express ideas through language. With this approach, critics examine the literary patterns which are foundational to the canonical text in order to discern the pre-literary oral traditions which led to their written counterparts. By understanding these oral traditions, researchers can gain a better understanding of the ancient cultural practices of Israel. Pioneered by Hermann Gunkel, form critics



shifted [their] attention from the JEDP documents as separate sources to the background and history of the literary types of which they consisted and which they shared in common. [They] attempted to identify these

types by their structural and stylistic patterns, to determine the kinds of sociocultural-religious settings (*Sitz im Leben*) that gave rise to them, and to trace the transmission of the individual compositions from their (oral) creation to their present place in the sacred text.¹⁵

Form criticism has provided rich profit for OT studies. As Merrill observes,

To see that the genealogies of Genesis have a particular function based on their form (i.e., to represent connections between covenant promises and to highlight specific links) is exegetically and theologically useful. Likewise, to know that the covenant texts associated with Abraham and the patriarchs are, by form, in the pattern of royal land-grant treaties is to give the Abrahamic covenant a rich theological dimension.... Form criticism, judiciously employed, has self-evident value.¹⁶

On the other hand, the approach has tended to allow pre-textual matters to overshadow the text itself. It also tended to view Israel as a primitive society incapable of written messages, when in reality archaeology confirms what the Bible clearly states: Israel possessed writing much early that we once thought. Thus, we cannot identify them as a primitive, nomadic people simply based on oral traditions. This approach assumes that poetry was the earliest form of linguistic form. However, all indications suggest that Israel's oldest materials are narrative in form rather than poetic, indicating that prioritizing oral forms over the text itself can result in misguided conclusions.

Yet the most significant weakness of the approach is the patently unscientific approach of this criticism. Everything about form criticism involves subjectivity, conjecture, and presupposition, all of which is intended to differentiate between the written text and the oral traditions upon which they are based. The approach is anything but scientific.

Summary & Illustration

Of the various schools of higher criticism, only four have been discussed in this study, yet others exist, including *tradition criticism*, *redaction criticism*, *rhetorical criticism*, *structural criticism*, and *canonical criticism*. Are these approaches all inherently evil? The answer should be a clear, "No." As has been observed already, most of these approaches have generated some positive results in furthering OT biblical studies. Yet there are serious negative consequences from them as well.

In 1893, J. W. McGarvey composed a short piece entitled, "A Literary Analysis of an Ancient Poem." The purpose of the piece was to uncover the ridiculous nature of higher criticism. In it, McGarvey presents a well-known nursery rhyme, which he then proceeds to analyze based on higher critical methodology. What results is an amusing satire that captures perfectly the irrational hubris of higher criticism:

¹⁵ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶ Ibid., 140-1.

Poem

*Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone.
When she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.*

Analysis

In the uncritical ages of the past, this poem was believed to be the composition of a single person—a very ancient English woman by the name of Goose. Whether we should style her Mrs. Goose, or Miss Goose, we have no means of deciding with certainty, for the stories which have come down to historical times concerning her are mostly legendary. It might be supposed that the title “mother” would settle this difficult question; but, as in certain convents of our day, venerable spinsters are styled Mother, so may it have been in the days of Goose.

But, leaving this interesting question as one for further historical inquiry, we turn to the poem itself, and by applying to it the scientific process of literary analysis, we find that the document did not originate, as our fathers have supposed, from a single author, but that it is a composite structure, at least two original documents having been composed within it by a Redactor. This appears from the incongruities between the two traditions which evidently underlie the poem.

One of these traditions represents the heroine of the poem, a venerable Mrs. Hubbard, as a benevolent woman, who loved her dog, as appears from the fact that she went to the cupboard to get him some food. If we had the whole story, we should doubtless find that she did this every time the dog was hungry, and as she surely would not go to the cupboard for the dog’s food unless she knew there was some in the cupboard, we can easily fill out the story of her benevolence by assuming that she put something away for the dog when she ate her own meals.

Now, in direct conflict with this, the other tradition had it that she kept the dog “poor;” for he is called her “poor dog;” and, in keeping with this fact, instead of giving him meat, she gave him nothing but bones. Indeed, so extreme was her stinginess toward the poor dog that, according to this tradition, she actually put away the bones in the cupboard with which to mock the poor dog’s hunger.

A woman could scarcely be represented more inconsistently than Mrs. Hubbard was by these two traditions; and consequently none but those who are fettered by tradition, can fail to see that the two must have originated from two different authors.

For the sake of distinction, we shall style one of the authors, Goose A, and the other, Goose B. In these two forms, then, the traditions concerning this ancient owner of a dog came down from prehistoric times. At length there arose a literary age in England, and then R [Redactor] put together into one the accounts written by the two geese, but failed to conceal their incongruities, so that unto this day, Mother Hubbard is placed in the ridiculous light of going to the cupboard when there was nothing in it; of going there, notwithstanding her kindness to her dog, to tantalize him by getting him a mere **bone**; and to cap the climax, of going all the way to the cupboard to get the bone when she knew very well that not a bone was there.

Some people are unscientific enough to think, that in thus analyzing the poem, we are seeking to destroy its value; but every one who has the critical faculty developed can see that this ancient household lyric is much more precious to our souls since we have come to understand its structure; and that, contradictory as its two source documents were, it is a blessed thing that, in the providence of God, both have been preserved in such a form that critical analysis is capable of separating and restoring them (1910, 34-36).

The Problems with Higher Criticism

As we have already noted, the Jewish and Christian communities existed for 2,000 years without any question of the origin, inerrancy, or authority of Scripture. It wasn't until rationality took over that scholars began to ask unique and novel questions about the text—questions which no one before them had even thought to ask.

But of what benefit is this type of discussion? How does it affect the person in the pew? How does it affect me and you? The answer is fairly simple, really. Barrick summarizes it well:

How we approach the Scriptures not only determines our ultimate interpretation, but it also determines our ultimate system of theology. If we establish our interpretation or theology on a reconstruction of the text and its historical, literary, and linguistic context, then our interpretation and theology are not based upon the text as we have it.¹⁷

In other words, will we base our theology on what we know and can study objectively (the written text) or on that which is based upon subjective conjecture and skeptical assumptions? There is great irony in the fact that out of the Age of Reason and the scientific method came a critical methodology for studying history and Scripture that is thoroughly unscientific. As Clines states,

It is ironic, is it not, that the soundest historical-critical scholar, who will find talk of themes and structures “subjective” in the extreme, will have no hesitation in expounding the significance of a (sometimes conjectural) document from a conjectural period for a hypothetical audience of which he has, even if he has defined the period correctly, only the most meager knowledge, without any control over the all-important questions of how representative of and how acceptable to the community the given document was.¹⁸

In reality, there are some key identifiable features that can help a lay Christian identify higher criticism, i.e., liberal criticism. These key identifications are helpfully summarized by Gleason Archer:¹⁹

Keys to Identify Liberal Criticism

- (1) Employs circular reasoning
- (2) Textual evidence is devalued in favor of Hegelian dialectic
- (3) Assumes lower literary standard for Hebrew authors than contemporaries
- (4) Gives pagan documents prior credibility over Scripture
- (5) Assumes a purely human origin for Israel's religion
- (6) Artificially concocted “discrepancies” are manipulated as proof texts for biblical error
- (7) Espouses literary duplication or repetition as demonstrating diverse authorship
- (8) Claims “scientific reliability” for dating documents according to a theory of evolution
- (9) Assumes a superior knowledge of ancient history over original authors who lived 2,000 years plus closer to the events which they record

¹⁷ Barrick, “Old Testament Introduction,” 53.

¹⁸ D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, JSOTSS 10 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1978), 14.

¹⁹ Archer, *Old Testament Introduction*, 112.

APPENDIX 1

Description of the Four Documents of the Documentary Hypothesis²⁰

J	Written about 850 B.C. by an unknown writer in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He was especially interested in personal biography, characterized by vivid delineation of character. He often portrayed or referred to God in anthropomorphic terms (i.e., as if He possessed the body, parts, and passions of a human being). He also had a prophet-like interest in ethical and theological reflections, but little interest in sacrifice or ritual.
E	Written about 750 B.C. by an unknown writer in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was more objective than J in his narrative style and was less consciously tinged with ethical and theological reflection. He tended rather to dwell upon concrete particulars (or the origins of names or customs of particular importance to Israelite culture). In Genesis, E shows an interest in ritual and worship, and he represents God as communicating through dreams and visions (rather than through direct anthropomorphic contact, after the fashion of J). In Exodus through Numbers, E exalts Moses as a unique miracle worker, with whom God could communicate in anthropomorphic guise. About 650 B.C. an unknown redactor combined J and E into a single document: J-E.
D	Composed, possibly under the direction of the high priest Hilkiah, as an official program for the party of reform sponsored by King Josiah in the revival of 621 B.C. Its object was to compel all the subjects of the kingdom of Judah to abandon their local sanctuaries on the “high places” and bring all their sacrifices and religious contributions to the temple in Jerusalem. This document was strongly under the influence of the prophetic movement, particularly of Jeremiah. Members of this same Deuteronomic school later reworked the historical accounts recorded in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.
P	Composed in various stages, all the way from Ezekiel, with his Holiness Code (Lev 17-26) ca. 570 B.C. (known as H), to Ezra, “the ready scribe in the law of Moses” under whose guidance the latest priestly sections were added to the Torah. P is concerned with a systematic account of the origins and institutions of the Israelite theocracy. It shows a particular interest in origins, in genealogical lists, and details of sacrifice and ritual.

²⁰ Taken from Archer, *Old Testament Introduction*, 97.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of the Dialectical Development of the Documentary Hypothesis²¹

- (1) Astruc said that different divine names point to different sources—J and E division; this idea was extended more thoroughly by Eichhorn (E earlier than J).
- (2) De Wette defined D as a manufacture of Josiah's time (621 B.C.).
- (3) Hupfeld divided up E into the earlier E¹ (or P) and the later E² (which more closely resembles J). His order of documents was PEJD.
- (4) Graf thought that the legal portions of P were Exilic, latest of all, even though historical portions may be early. His order of documents was: P¹EJD².
- (5) Kuenen felt that historical portions of P must be as late as the legal. He gave as the order of documents: PEJD.
- (6) Wellhausen gave the Documentary Theory its classic expression, working out the JEDP sequence upon a systematic evolutionary pattern.

Observe the contradictions and reversals which characterize the development of this Documentary Theory. (1) Different divine name points to different author (Astruc, Eichhorn), each with his own circle of interest, style, and vocabulary. (2) Same divine name (Elohim), nevertheless employed by different authors (Hupfeld); whereas some E passages really do not greatly differ from J in circle of interest, style, or vocabulary. (3) That Elohist (P) which most differs from J in interest and style, must be the earliest (Jahweh being a later name for God than Elohim). (4) No, on the contrary, this P must be the latest instead of the earliest (for this fits in better with Evolutionary Theory about the development of Hebrew religion from the primitive polytheistic to the priest-ridden monotheistic). (5) J of course is later than E (all the critics up to Graf); but no, J is really earlier than E (Kuenen and Wellhausen).

²¹ Ibid., 98.

