

c. The Wellhausen Line

So far all of the men and ideas discussed fall into the general category or school known as the documentary hypothesis and the idea is that the Pentateuch is composed of documents from varying sources. If one has the proper clues one can determine the sources and restructure the original documents and the redacted whole. We now move from this to the development hypothesis. It is built on the documentary idea but has a whole new wrinkle to it. It could not stand without the documents but given the documents it is one of those assured finds of the modern world.

(1) Wellhausen (1844-1918)

Working with common ideas held by Graf and Kuenen, Wellhausen became the chief propagator of the development hypothesis, later moving into Old Testament interpretation and into New Testament studies as well. He suggested that the documents in the Pentateuch should really be arranged in such a way as to show the development of Israel's religious expression. The assumption was that Israel followed a common pattern of religious growth which it shared with the pagan nations surrounding it. To discover that pattern and interpret it was part of the development goal. In this line of thinking there were a few supporting ideas that aided his cause:

(a) The Darwinian theories of the development of the world and concepts of evolving life with the fittest surviving, etc.

(b) The Hegelian philosophy that tends to show a conclusion being tentatively reached after the controversy of thesis and anti-thesis.

The more critical concepts of history were also useful and from all of these it was determined that Israel's faith had come into being just as other movements of that time. The idea seemed plain that if all else developed on a simple to complex basis, religion would follow the same line. As you can probably see, the real problem is with revelation but I will try not to make too many emotive remarks on that line at this time.