

## Facts and Fancy about the Bible - 16

Textual criticism refers to the effort by scholars to restore texts as nearly as possible to their original form. Not only ancient works such as of the Iliad and the Odyssey, whose presumed author was Homer, but more recent productions as Dickens' Oliver Twist, have been subjected to this fundamental academic discipline, a lower branch of criticism.

The so-called higher criticism, deals with "questions of authenticity and attribution, of interpretation, and of literary and historical evaluation...In practice the operations of textual and 'higher'" criticism cannot be rigidly differentiated" - Enc.Brit.

Shortly after Voltaire's death, the German Biblical scholar J G Eichhorn published his Historical and Critical Introduction to the Old Testament, using methods of higher criticism, mostly based on purely natural origins rather than supernatural.

About thirty years later the German theologian W N De Wette, in his application of higher criticism, appeared to regard some Old Testament authors as a power hungry and self interested priestly class. He concluded that Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Pentateuch, was written about the same time as part of 2 kings, about eight centuries after Moses. Further, he accused the author of the books of 1st and 2nd Chronicles of rewriting the history of the kings to make it appear that they knew the laws because they had existed for a long time.

Higher critics who followed chose to interpret the Pentateuch as recording Israel's religion evolving over time from a crude nature worship into "ethical monotheism". J Wellhausen, adopting this approach, wrote Prolegomena to the History of Israel. In it he denied any historicity of the supernatural events which are reported in the Pentateuch, and treated most of its history as untrustworthy.

The work of the higher critics was not a sincere or genuine study of the message being presented. "Modern Pentateuchal criticism is largely based on philosophical presuppositions that rule out the possibility of God's supernatural intervention in history" - Zondervan Enc. of the Bible. This means that they set out in their studies having already rejected the five books as the authentic message of God given through Moses.

Rather than considering the message being presented, they were rather searching for apparent flaws, mistakes, inconsistencies, discrepancies, contradictions and errors to the discredit of the entire five books. The result of their work was a series of imaginary scenarios which if true would undermine the former acceptance of the Pentateuch as the word of God given through Moses.

Soon, God willing, we will look at some careful reviews of what the higher critics concluded about the Pentateuch. In passing, we note the ruling of the judges in a court case related in A.B. McKillop's book, The Spinster and the Prophet: H.G. Wells, Florence Deeks, and the Case of the Plagiarized Text.

The chief witness for Miss Deeks who accused Wells of plagiarism was an expert in textual criticism. The case was appealed all the way to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, England. Despite the fact that the books had matching structures, scope, and even contained identical factual errors, that court unanimously upheld the finding of the previous court which "rejected the evidence of the higher criticism and dismissed the case."