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Unapologetic Apologetics: Julius Wellhausen, Anti-Judaism, and Hebrew Bible Scholarship

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Abstract: Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) is in many ways the ancestor of modern Hebrew Bible scholarship. His *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* condensed decades of source critical work on the Torah into a documentary hypothesis that is still taught today in almost all Hebrew Bible courses in some form. What is not taught as frequently is the anti-Judaism that underpins his hypothesis. This is in part due to unapologetic apologetics regarding Wellhausen's bias, combined with the insistence that a nineteenth-century scholar cannot be judged by twenty-first century standards. These calls for compassion are made exclusively by white male scholars, leaving Jewish scholars the solitary task of pointing out Wellhausen's clear anti-Judaism. In a discipline that is already overwhelmingly white, male and Christian, the minimizing of Wellhausen's racism suggests two things. First, those who may criticize contextual biblical studies done by women and scholars of color have no problem pleading for a contextual understanding of Wellhausen while downplaying the growing anti-Judaism and nationalism that was a part of nineteenth-century Germany. Second, recent calls for inclusion in the Society of Biblical Literature may be well intentioned but ultimately useless if the guild cannot simply call one of its most brilliant founders the biased man that he was.

Keywords: Wellhausen; anti-Judaism; historical context



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1. Introduction

I read Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) for the first time as a graduate student more than twenty years ago. In many ways, Wellhausen is the ancestor of modern Hebrew Bible scholarship. His *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, originally published in 1878 as *Geschichte Israels*, condensed decades of source critical work on the Torah into a documentary hypothesis that is still taught in some form today in almost all Hebrew Bible courses. Undergraduate and graduate students read his translated work. When I look at my handwritten notes from that time, I notice exclamation marks and the word “bias” in the margins of the introduction, along with a scribbled comment in response to his claim that “the arguments which were brought into play as a rule derived all their force from a moral conviction that the ritual legislation must be old” (Wellhausen 1994, p. 11): “Fine. And I can argue that you have a moral conviction that ritual is late.” I learned as an undergraduate history major to be suspicious of any claims to scholarly objectivity. Wellhausen's dating of the priestly source, at least to me, came out of his own distaste for the Torah. By the time I approached the end of the work, I wrote a sarcastic “just great” in response to the following:

The removal of colour from the myths is the same thing as the process of Hebraising them. The Priestly Code appears to Hebraise less than the Jehovist; it refrains on principle from confounding different times and customs. But in fact it Hebraises much more; it cuts and shapes the whole of the materials so that they may serve as an introduction to the Mosaic legislation”. (Wellhausen 1994, p. 315)

The exclamation points returned, along with question marks, when reading Wellhausen's conclusions about the Torah as a late, backwards historical development and his claim that prophecy ended with Jeremiah (Wellhausen 1994, pp. 399, 401, 403, 422). Two things bothered me—the assumption that ritual had to be late and the underlying dislike for Judaism that seemed to be the foundation for the assumption. More than a decade later, when I taught my first Leviticus and Numbers course, I returned to Wellhausen as an example of early scholarly dismissal of the priestly texts as late for non-scholarly reasons.

Additionally, that example, which seemed so clear to my twenty-something and now forty-something mind, hardly receives a mention in scholarly analysis of Wellhausen, particularly by Hebrew Bible scholars. This is in part due to unapologetic apologetics regarding Wellhausen's bias, combined with the insistence that a nineteenth-century German scholar cannot be judged by twenty-first century definitions of bias. These calls for compassion towards Wellhausen are made exclusively by white male non-Jewish scholars, leaving Jewish scholars the unenviable task of pointing out Wellhausen's anti-Judaism. In an overwhelmingly white, male, and Christian academic field, the minimizing of Wellhausen's bias creates a two-pronged double standard. First, contextual biblical studies done by women and PGM (people of the global majority) can be criticized for lack of objectivity while Wellhausen's context offers a defense for his bias without recognizing the growing anti-Judaism and nationalism within nineteenth-century Germany. Second, recent calls for inclusivity within the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) may be well intentioned but ultimately useless if the guild cannot simply call one of its most brilliant founders the biased man that he was, without rationalization or defensiveness.

2. Wellhausen and Anti-Jewish Interpretation of the Torah

On the one hundredth anniversary of the *Prolegomena* in 1978, Moshe Weinfeld pointed out Wellhausen's misreading of the Torah and Judaism. While noting that "Christian scholarship has generally adhered to the Wellhausenian approach" regarding the dating of the Priestly source, Wellhausen himself distorted Judaism through his description of the Torah (Weinfeld 1978, pp. 2, 5–6). As a consequence, his claim that priestly texts must be post-exilic is inaccurate (Weinfeld 1978, pp. 21–22, 25, 29). Regarding Wellhausen's bias, Weinfeld argues,

This aspect of Wellhausen's approach and the prejudice it entails provide the explanation for Wellhausen's compulsion to see the laws of the Priestly document as a product of post-exilic times. He could not conceive of the 'dry' regulations of the Priestly code as an authentic Israelite creation of the prophetic age; they must be a manifestation of the 'decline and decay' of Judaism which began in the exile and which paved the way for the subsequent Pharisaic theocracy. (Weinfeld 1978, pp. 14–15)

Against Wellhausen, Weinfeld concludes that priestly texts have a diversity of dates and cannot be limited to the inferior post-exilic period (Weinfeld 1978, p. 39).

Lou Silberman, writing in 1982, argues that Wellhausen's view of Judaism "has more in common with the religious sentiments of Wellhausen's own time than with the ascertainable religious developments of Israelite and Jewish antiquity itself" (Silberman 1982, p. 75). While Solomon Schechter characterizes Wellhausen as an anti-Semite in 1903, Silberman does not; however, he states that the *Prolegomena*, "like practically everything written by German Protestant theologians of the period and many subsequently and to this day, is a work of anti-Judaism" (Silberman 1982, p. 75). The support for the thesis comes from the ways Wellhausen connects the Torah to Judaism, along with the language used to describe this connection. Wellhausen calls priestly writings "'a green tree that in olden times grew out of the soil as it would and could; subsequently it became dried-out timber that was cut to pattern with compass and square'" (ind. qtd. in Silberman 1982, p. 76). For him, the creation of historical tradition, exemplified by Chronicles, has its foundation in the Torah and therefore in Judaism (Silberman 1982, p. 76). Wellhausen contrasts what he considers the deadness of the Torah with the vitality of the prophets. However, as

Silberman argues, Wellhausen projects his contemporary beliefs about religious spontaneity and anti-institutionalization back onto post-exilic Israel and priestly texts in the Torah (Silberman 1982, pp. 77–78). Wellhausen names the Torah, “the sacred constitution of Judaism”, “an artificial product”, implying a lifeless and even fake document (Wellhausen 1994, p. 421). The text, however, becomes an ancient stand-in for Wellhausen’s Christian opponents; as Silberman argues, the Judaism that in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE invented the Law that sidled in was invented in the nineteenth century by German biblical scholarship of which Wellhausen was the most influential spokesman” (Silberman 1982, p. 79). According to Wellhausen, the Torah, the enemy of natural and spontaneous worship, “in its nature . . . is intimately allied to the old Catholic church, which was in fact its child. As a matter of taste it may be objectionable to speak of the Jewish church, but as a matter of history it is not inaccurate” (Wellhausen 1994, p. 422). Yet, it is.

The characterization is inaccurate but opportunistic. Wellhausen describes the Torah as heathen, the opposite of prophecy (Wellhausen 1994, pp. 422–23), a text that takes people “from the natural sphere, and made divine means of grace, which [YHWH] has instituted in Israel as sacraments of the theocracy . . . Worship no longer springs from an inner impulse, it has come to be an exercise of religiosity” (Wellhausen 1994, p. 424). Why the emphasis on naturalness and the prophets? Because Wellhausen personally prefers them to the Torah, “a ghost that makes a noise indeed, but is not visible and really effects nothing” (Wellhausen 1994, p. 3). The Torah is late and artificial because that fits Wellhausen’s pre-existing bias against ritual. He concludes:

At the restoration of Judaism the old usages were patched together in a new system, which, however, only served as the form to preserve something that was nobler in its nature, but could not have been saved otherwise than in a narrow shell that stoutly resisted all foreign influences. That heathenism in Israel against which the prophets vainly protested was inwardly overcome by the law on its own ground, and the cultus, after nature had been killed in it, became the shield of supernaturalistic monotheism”. (Wellhausen 1994, p. 425)

The distinction between true and false religion stands out to Silberman, who reaches the following conclusion: “Judaism could continue to be for the liberal Protestant the dark background against which the incandescence of the religion of Jesus could ever more brightly shine, once it had been purged of the dross of dogma. What had been dogmatic was now scientific. Of the consequence of this I shall not write” (Silberman 1982, p. 79). Silberman alludes to the link between German biblical scholarship and what became genocidal German anti-Semitism.

Silberman’s conclusions about Wellhausen’s bias appear two decades later in Byron L. Sherwin’s (2006) essay about Abraham Joshua Heschel. Sherwin, like Schechter a century earlier, calls Wellhausen “the prominent liberal Protestant theologian, biblical scholar and anti-Semite” (Sherwin 2006, p. 42). Why? Because Wellhausen argues that the Torah and rabbinic teaching contaminated the true Judaism of the prophets, which Jesus had to clean up (Sherwin 2006, p. 43). Jesus’ own words then are contaminated by “the Church, particularly the Catholic church . . . through legalism, faulty biblical exegesis and ritualism” (Sherwin 2006, p. 43). Sherwin criticizes “early liberal Judaism” for utilizing Wellhausen’s views about prophecy and Torah, concluding that Wellhausen not only defines prophecy incorrectly but that “the prophets were fierce advocates and defenders of the national aspirations of the people of Israel. The portrait of the prophets put forth by Wellhausen and adapted by huge segments of modern Jewry is neither ‘prophetic’ nor ‘Judaism.’ Rather, it is an imposition of Enlightenment and liberal Protestant ideas upon Jewish theology and practice” (Sherwin 2006, pp. 45–46). From Sherwin’s perspective, a Judaism that relies upon Protestantism rejects its theological and cultural particularity.

Wellhausen’s views of the Torah and Judaism matter because of their effects upon scholarship and their historical consequences. Notably, however, scholars who recognize Wellhausen’s negative impact usually are not Hebrew Bible scholars. Mayer I. Gruber is the exception. Writing about postcolonial theory and ancient Israel, he includes a section

entitled “Wellhausen’s Theological Problem” (Gruber 2001, p. 10). Since Wellhausen prioritized the prophets as representatives of authentic Judaism, what should he do with the Torah? The answer is to separate the Torah from ancient Israel by making it a post-exilic Jewish invention (Gruber 2001, pp. 10–11). Gruber notes that

The civil religion of the so-called secular majority in the modern State of Israel also adopted Wellhausen’s view that the authentic basis for the life of the new Israel was the Israelite heritage of the pre-exilic, i.e., the pre-586 BCE era. For Wellhausen as for ancient and medieval Christianity the new Israel meant Christianity; for the civil religion of the modern State of Israel the new Israel meant the state proclaimed by David Ben-Gurion of 14 May 1948. (Gruber 2001, p. 11)

Wellhausen’s view, coming out of an anti-Jewish bias, influenced the religious identity of a modern Jewish country. As Gruber, living and working in Israel, writes,

Modern Israel bought into Wellhausen’s thesis that whatever Israel really was in the Iron Age is supposed to be normative forever; whatever had been added on in the post-exilic age is tendentious and ephemeral. The idea, still adhered to by many people belonging to the so-called secular majority in the modern State of Israel is that the culture and religion of the new independent state must be established upon the bedrock of its Iron Age past and not upon the ephemeral additions and misinterpretation created by Jewish priests in the post-exilic era. (Gruber 2001, p. 14)

This idea creates two problems—first, archaeology offers scant support for biblical stories such as the exodus; and second, Israel itself is viewed as a colonial power in the region without taking seriously “the post-colonial context of Israeli biblical studies and Israeli archaeology” (Gruber 2001, pp. 16, 14).

Gruber suggests that Israelis are trying to straddle the gap between being invaders and natives and this needs to stop (Gruber 2001, p. 17). He writes, “When Israel was in 1948 still a colonial people in search of usable past for the basis of its present, it bought into Wellhausen’s thesis, concerning the centrality of the Iron Age” (Gruber 2001, pp. 18–19). Postcolonialism, however, enables the interpreter to analyze critically past events and views that may not be original to the no longer colonized people and to develop their own reading and interpretive strategies. Perhaps that includes rethinking the problematic use of Wellhausen. In a section entitled “A feminist perspective”, Gruber notes that “the holocaust, we should remember, fully demonstrated the colonial position of the Jewish people vis à vis the world at large . . . the establishment of [Israel] transformed the status of the Jews from that of a colonial people to that of a post-colonial people” (Gruber 2001, pp. 19, 20). Gruber calls for a postcolonial reading of ancient Israel and a reclaiming of post-exilic Judaism, along with a reckoning with Wellhausen:

Few biblical scholars notice that Wellhausen’s *Prolegomena* ends with the words “For the accomplishment of this [the extinction of Judaism] many centuries may be required” (Wellhausen 1994, p. 548). Why do not [sic] people notice this? Because people do not see what is unpleasant. Forced to see what is unpleasant, many people go into denial and accuse the person or persons who are showing them reality of themselves suffering from paranoia”. (Gruber 2001, p. 23)

As we will see, Gruber recognizes the willful ignorance of so many in the field.

The only other scholars who recognize Wellhausen’s views as problematic and also influential in German history and theology come either from other disciplines or career fields. Philosopher Jan Rehmann, writing about Friedrich Nietzsche, notes that “Wellhausen and most nineteenth-century theologians applied their anti-Judaism to where they thought it properly be-longed, namely Judaism” (Rehmann 2005, p. 148). Nietzsche’s admiration for, or at least lack of criticism of, early Israel comes from Wellhausen, “whose view on the history of the Old Testament is marked by a sharp dichotomy between a healthy, monarchical Israel on the one hand and an artificial, priestly Judaism on the other” (Rehmann 2005, p. 150). Nietzsche bought the *Prolegomena* in 1883 and *Abriss der Geschichte Israels*

und Judas the following year (Rehmann 2005, p. 150, n.11). Rehmann links what he calls Wellhausen's "Judeophobic images" to "Nietzsche's descriptions of Jewish 'resentment'" (Rehmann 2005, p. 151). Nietzsche's analysis of Wellhausen later appears in his 1888 book, *The Antichrist*, where he writes, "'The Jewish priesthood [. . .] accomplished a miracle of falsification [. . .] They translated the past of their own people into religious terms, that is, they turned it into a stupid salvation mechanism of guilt before [YHWH], and punishment'" (ind. qtd. in Rehmann 2005, p. 152). By using Wellhausen, Nietzsche links himself to "mainstream Protestant Anti-Judaism", although he focuses more on social class than theology (Rehmann 2005, p. 152).

New Testament scholar Anders Gerdmar notes Wellhausen's impact on the History of Religions school, especially on Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920), who wrote an influential work on Judaism in which Jesus is the premier prophet and therefore resists Judaism, a religion hindered by the Torah (Gerdmar 2009, pp. 145, 148, 153, 180). Because he uses Wellhausen verbatim and without citation, "Bousset thus comes across as a true representative of Wellhausen's tradition"; "interwoven in Bousset's historiography is an openly and frequently aired prejudice towards Jews and Judaism, which reflects the spirit of his age and his own view of Judaism" (Gerdmar 2009, p. 161). His book was the premier work on Judaism in Germany until well after World War II (Gerdmar 2009, p. 150). Bousset's less popular contemporary, Johannes Weiss (1863–1914), however, suggests that Wellhausen is "being affected by contemporary ideas and not appreciating the sources" (Gerdmar 2009, p. 149). In other words, contemporary anti-Judaism may be influencing Wellhausen's interpretation of ancient texts. Gerdmar notes the rising anti-Semitism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century German politics, since Bousset and Weiss "were politically conscious and active" (Gerdmar 2009, pp. 175, 176–77). What became standard Nazi biblical interpretation, "loving the Jews as heirs of the prophets, while warning against them as a primary social threat", was already circulating in the days of Wellhausen and his peers (Gerdmar 2009, p. 178). Gerdmar concludes that Bousset's view of Judaism, influenced by Wellhausen, could be applied to modern Jews, along with Bousset's claims that Jews were foreign, opportunistic antagonists. Such views "that would be labelled as anti-Semitic today were acceptable then" (Gerdmar 2009, pp. 187–88). Tricia Miller, an evangelical Christian whose Ph.D. is in Hebrew Bible and who works for CAMERA, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (Reclaiming Conservatism 2016), concisely summarizes why Wellhausen's bias mattered: "By the twentieth century, the combination of centuries of anti-Semitic biblical scholarship represented by the work of Wellhausen and ecclesiastical anti-Judaism rooted in Luther's *adversus Iudaeos* diatribes provided the theological justification used by Adolf Hitler and German theologians for the attempted annihilation of the Jews during the Holocaust" (Miller 2015, p. 150). Yet, Miller's statement is the exception that proves the rule. Other Hebrew Bible scholars have avoided this issue entirely, either through silence or apologetics.

3. Crickets or Apologetics: Two Responses to Wellhausen's Anti-Judaism

The silent scholars choose to say nothing substantive about Wellhausen's bias. In his 2016 book, *Wellhausen and Kaufmann: Ancient Israel and Its Religious History in the Works of Julius Wellhausen and Yehezkel Kaufmann*, Aly Elrefaei notes Wellhausen's preference for pre-exilic Israel and the separation he makes "between 'Israel' and 'Judaism'" (pp. 41, 38). While post-exilic Judaism receives an unfavorable analysis, Elrefaei says nothing about Wellhausen's religious or political contexts" (Elrefaei 2016, p. 47). Even when citing the last paragraph in the *Prolegomena*, where Silberman notes the anti-Jewish implications of Wellhausen's rhetoric, Elrefaei says, "The implication of Wellhausen's dating of the law was of far greater importance to his understanding of the history of Israel" (Elrefaei 2016, p. 60). He concludes that "Wellhausen's sympathy towards the early phase of Israelite religion is plainly evident from his writings" (Elrefaei 2016, p. 73). Sympathy may be too mild of a word for bias; however, some of Elrefaei's secondary sources includes Wellhausen apologists such as Reinhard Kratz (Elrefaei 2016, pp. 34, 44). Collin Cornell's 2019 article

about Brevard Childs and Wellhausen notes Wellhausen's views about "Israelite religion and early Judaism", referring to Kratz (p. 145). Wellhausen's Christian identity shaped his practices, and he clearly preferred pre-exilic religion to what he considered Judaism's separation of people from the deity (Cornell 2019, pp. 146, 147). Cornell uses Wellhausen as a way to continue canonical biblical criticism, which Childs argued for—"It seems that if this were possible for Childs, it could also be possible for one of his interpretive successors—on canonical grounds and in light of Israel's own testimony—to embrace Wellhausen's historical claim about a 'sharp break' between ancient Israelite religion" (Cornell 2019, p. 158). However, Cornell says nothing about the theological or cultural implications of Wellhausen's claims. The silence speaks, saying that such implications are irrelevant to larger Christian and scholarly uses for Wellhausen. Instead, the silence functions as a defense of Wellhausen. Such defenses began decades earlier.

Douglas A. Knight's 1994 foreword remains the one attached to the primary English translation of the *Prolegomena*, and it begins the Wellhausen apology tour. He glosses over Wellhausen's language about Judaism as follows:

While this image of Judaism appears unfairly negative, one must be aware (1) that he had only Second-Temple Judaism in view and not the Talmudic period and later, (2) that he was trying to capture the impact of the new theocratic system on the religion of the time, and (3) that he was primarily engaged in a comparison of the epochs of Israelite and early Jewish history with each other (Knight 1994, p. xiv).

So, because Wellhausen only makes anti-Jewish comments about early Jewish history, it is not that bad. In a subsequent footnote, Knight states,

Wellhausen's treatment of early Judaism has opened him to serious charges—from espousing anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism, to holding then-prevalent German attitudes towards the Jewish people, to contributing inadvertently to the disastrous effects of twentieth-century anti-Semitism in Germany, or at least to being anti-institutional in his regard for both Christian and Jewish forms of religion. Certainly the last-mentioned charge seems justified inasmuch as it is consistent with his various comments about Christianity and Judaism, but the larger question of his presuppositions and their impact on his work is not yet settled and deserves further scrutiny. (Knight 1994, p. xv, n.23)

However, was further scrutiny needed even then? Knight cites Silberman's article in his footnote, and the issue of Wellhausen's anti-Judaism is not debatable there, along with Wellhausen's historical context or the effects of his words. Knight also cites Rolf Rendtorff's (1983) article, "The Jewish Bible and Its Anti-Jewish Interpretation", in which Rendtorff states, "Above all, Wellhausen's historical picture has become theologized and his polemical anti-Judaism has become an integral part not only of the 'history of Israel,' but also of the 'theology of the Old Testament,' echoed by Martin Noth and Gerhard Von Rad (pp. 13, 14). So, why the hesitation? Knight concludes that "Wellhausen is refreshingly direct in expressing his opinions, and some of the statements have scandalized his readers. At all points one senses *being in the company of genius* . . . Wellhausen is cavalierly dismissed or ignored at one's own peril. He is often misunderstood, *caricatured with stereotypes and generalities that are remote from the subtleties* present in his scholarship" (Knight 1994, p. xvi; *emp mine*). Wellhausen's brilliance must not be dimmed by details like anti-Judaism.

John Barton outlines what may be at stake for Hebrew Bible scholars who attempt to critique Wellhausen. He begins with a warning about what he calls "'cultural exegesis'" (most likely contextual exegesis today): "But 'cultural exegesis' also has a negative sense, as a way of identifying the cultural rootedness of interpreters with whom we disagree. It belongs essentially to the world of the sociology of knowledge, and emphasizes that there are not neutral or objective interpreters" (Barton 1995, p. 316). The idea that charging someone with cultural exegesis must inevitably be a bad thing may be the problem; to be a product of one's time makes one human. It neither absolves nor protects one from one's errors; it simply acknowledges reality. In Wellhausen's case, Barton observes that Wellhausen's "value judgment" influenced his dating of the Torah, and those judg-

ments have opened him up to complaints from Jewish scholars: “And the third, and most passionately felt criticism, is that he was anti-semitic, hating Judaism and wanting nothing more than to show it up as an artificially concocted religion, designed by proto-rabbis who were the enemies of all that is natural and spontaneous in religious sentiment” (Barton 1995, pp. 318–19). Barton’s response to the criticism manages to be simultaneously vague and specific. He writes that “overtly anti-semitic sentiments *are hardly to be found* in Wellhausen’s works, but *occasionally what one may call the common nineteenth-century mid-European anti-Jewish comment does indeed appear*, leading one to surmise that there may have been a good deal beneath the surface in the way of largely subconscious anti-semitism” (Barton 1995, p. 322; *emp mine*). The verbs and adverbs carry a lot of weight here. Wellhausen is sometimes anti-Jewish and rarely anti-Semitic, but he may have been an accidentally biased man of his time.

Why not just call Wellhausen a garden-variety bigot? Because Wellhausen was more interested in critiquing contemporary Christianity than contemporary Judaism, and his peers rarely called him anti-Semitic (Barton 1995, pp. 323–25). So, for Barton, “this anti-institutionalism, rather than the anti-semitism which was a by-product of it, is what is central to understanding the character of his research” (Barton 1995, p. 325). The “rather than” creates a false hierarchy, in which anti-Judaism is not as important as anti-clericalism to Wellhausen. The problem is that Wellhausen used his interlocking biases to criticize contemporary Christianity and ancient Judaism, with serious consequences for the continued development of German anti-Judaism—scholarship is neither done in nor can be confined to multiple individual silos. However, for Barton, anti-Judaism must be siloed when discussing Wellhausen, because as a typical nineteenth-century German scholar, he believed in his own objectivity, “while his anti-semitism, though not to be ignored, played a very small part in dictating the form his reconstructions took. In a way, the single most important presupposition for Wellhausen, and the one which continued (until very recently) to set the agenda for biblical study, is . . . the notion that research should be presuppositionless” (Barton 1995, pp. 326–27). However, if Wellhausen had presuppositions, and Barton acknowledges that, then why must one presupposition be less important than the other? Why minimize Wellhausen’s anti-Judaism? The answer is in Barton’s conclusion:

Anyone who wishes to shake off his influence will find that almost the whole basis of modern biblical study unravels in the process . . . it is the work of a large, uncluttered and creative mind, and at the same time as it demonstrates how far interpretation is influenced by cultural assumptions, it also offers hope for the human ability to transcend them and to communicate across the gulfs that divide us. (Barton 1995, p. 329)

Because Wellhausen is so important, his bias can only be alluded to in passing and should not detract from his work. That is cold comfort to Jewish scholars. Additionally, minimizing cultural assumptions is not transcendence—it is ignorance. Barton wants to call Wellhausen a man of his time without addressing the ugliness of his time and his contributions to that ugliness.

Barton makes a similar but more nuanced argument in a 2020 essay. While arguing that Wellhausen was not anti-Semitic in the sense of hating Jews or wishing them harm, either individually or collectively, he also notes that one may accept Wellhausen’s hypothesis without rejecting Judaism (Barton 2020). Instead, rabbinic Judaism “is a precious living tradition to be affirmed, not sniped at” (Barton 2020). Even with the shift, however, Alan T. Levenson, in response to Barton, notes that Wellhausen’s language “was explicit in its anti-Judaism” and that in context, the language harmed German Jews: “For these reasons, having as much to do with Imperial Germany as Biblical scholarship, I take a less forgiving view of Wellhausen’s anti-Judaism” than Barton (Levenson 2021). Even with the criticism, Barton’s view is less effusive than that of other apologists.

In his 2009 essay on Wellhausen's legacy, Reinhard G. Kratz praises Wellhausen while actively defending his anti-Judaism. Wellhausen cannot be described solely as a man of his time:

But a simple historicization (or a relativization grounded in the history of the time) does not do justice to Wellhausen and his kind of historical criticism. *The fact that he was rooted in his time does not exclude the possibility that he can have seen some things correctly.* At any rate Wellhausen's picture of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam cannot simply be bound up with the nineteenth century and its philosophies or ideologies (Kratz 2009, p. 391; *emp mine*—the sentence is repeated almost verbatim in Kratz 2015, p. 415).

What Wellhausen sees correctly, according to Kratz, is the correct dating of the Torah (Kratz 2015, p. 409). Additionally, Wellhausen's careful analysis of literature and his use of language "make [his] picture of the origin of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam so convincing and reading his works so very enjoyable" (Kratz 2015, p. 411). The challenge here is that Kratz almost does not want to bind Wellhausen to the nineteenth century at all, lest he lose some of his distinctiveness. Kratz quotes M.D. Coogan in a footnote, acknowledging Wellhausen's work's "implicit anti-Semitism in its characterization of early Judaism as sterile and legalistic" (Kratz 2009, p. 391, n.23). For Kratz, however, Wellhausen's view of historiography "sheds light on the charge of anti-Judaism which is often raised against him" (Kratz 2009, p. 393). Specifically, Wellhausen views post-exilic Jewish texts as inventions and not strictly as matter-of-fact historical events (Kratz 2009, pp. 394–96). Although Wellhausen has "an extremely ambivalent attitude to ancient Judaism and the Jewish law", it is not due to German anti-Semitism (Kratz 2009, p. 396). While he used "the usual commonplaces of everyday language ... there is no trace of this in personal dealings with Jewish colleagues" (Kratz 2009, p. 397). Additionally, Paul Michael Kurtz notes that Wellhausen unsuccessfully lobbied for a "chair in Jewish Studies" in 1915 (Kurtz 2015, p. 4). So, because Wellhausen was nice to Jews, the niceness somehow precluded him from being anti-Jewish. For Kratz, extensive knowledge of "the 'Jewish' side of the Old Testament, which makes up far more than 'half' of it", matters most (Kratz 2009, p. 400). While knowledge in theory can act as an antidote to bias, that only works if one recognizes one's bias. Wellhausen, like many, did not.

Additionally, he lived in a highly militaristic and militarized Germany (Kurtz 2015, p. 1). According to Paul Michael Kurtz, Wellhausen described himself as "wildly conservative" (Kurtz 2015, p. 2). He fully supported Kaiser Wilhelm II and Germany's World War I efforts. Although Wellhausen signed a 1915 petition "to limit annexation and call for peaceful terms", he also wrote earlier in that year, "Now the [Prussian state] is doubtless fully justified with respect to its enemies, thank God! But even were it at fault, I would neither want nor be able to renounce it. I do not cudgel my Christian brains about it" (Kurtz 2015, pp. 5–6). Having sworn loyalty to the state in 1872, Wellhausen maintained that loyalty. In his scholarship, "ancient Israel ... embodied all 'the Jews' did not" (Kurtz 2015, pp. 9, 13). Additionally, his admiration for Israel and the prophets helps explain his late date for the Torah. Kurtz does not draw any conclusions from his research (Kurtz 2015, pp. 13, 16). He simply finishes his article as follows: "Perhaps continuing the legacy of Wellhausen may lie less in searching his sources as he did than taking his own histories as a legitimate object of inquiry to see, like him, how concerns of the present made their way into portrayals of the past" (Kurtz 2015, p. 18). There are two problems with this seemingly irenic suggestion. First, while Wellhausen may recognize post-exilic Judaism's need to ensure its own survival, he describes that need by using anti-Jewish language. Second, scholarly analysis of Wellhausen regularly bypasses his history by suggesting his context did not directly shape his scholarship. Even Kurtz does not talk about how Wellhausen's German Protestant Christian identity may have influenced his views about Israel and Judaism.

The second problem, however, predates Kurtz. In their 2013 article entitled "The Invention and Persistence of Wellhausen's World", Walter Brueggemann and Davis Hanks

note that Wellhausen's Dutch contemporary Abraham Kuenen made European Christianity the standard for all other religions, which inevitably fell short of that standard (Brueggemann and Hankins 2013, pp. 20–23). They note, "Our intent is not to indict but simply to notice that these judgments made in the nineteenth century, led in important ways by Kuenen in his Dutch context, continued well into the mainstream of the twentieth century" (Brueggemann and Hankins 2013, p. 24). Yet, if "[they] see, to move beyond that model", why not criticize it (Brueggemann and Hankins 2013, p. 24)? Observation without analysis seems problematic in its own right, as if some scholars cannot be touched. Wellhausen's belief in prophetic religious superiority came from the same belief that Christianity fully embodied the prophetic tradition (Brueggemann and Hankins 2013, pp. 25–26). Brueggemann and Hankins quote Solomon Schechter—"higher criticism is higher anti-Semitism" (Brueggemann and Hankins 2013, pp. 26–27). So, what is to be done? They argue for critical biblical theology, which acknowledges the public nature of the field and the ways that personal and social context shapes theology. They note Wellhausen's lasting influence in biblical studies but reject "the idea that the historian ought to attempt to clear ideology away before beginning his or her work" (Brueggemann and Hankins 2013, pp. 28–29). We are all products of our environment; however, some of the elements in our environment are more toxic than others. It is enough, then, to quote Schechter and not connect the quotation to Wellhausen? Brueggemann and Hankins want to avoid "either ideological biblical scientism or naïve theological confessionalism" (Brueggemann and Hankins 2013, p. 30). Yet, they manage to express this desire without saying a word against the scholar who helped create the problem that they now insist must be solved.

4. So What?

What does Wellhausen have to do with the Hebrew Bible, race, and racism, and why am I picking on him and his interpreters? The answer lies in the interconnectedness of methodology and idolatry and the consequences of both for Hebrew Bible scholarship. Methodologically, Wellhausen's defenders want to justify his bias by linking him to nineteenth-century Germany *and* claiming he was not *too* biased, if at all. He becomes a part of his context yet simultaneously transcends it, because of his significance to the field. He becomes an idol that can be worshipped and whose biases cannot be substantively challenged. This creates a type of methodological double standard, where white male Christian superstars get a pass for their contextual bigotry yet women and PGM scholars may be marginalized for being products of their contexts and/or doing scholarship accordingly. Wellhausen and the history of his interpretation exemplify the tension between methodological change and scholarly anxiety about those doing the changing. For example, the 1999 volume *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* has helped me introduce students to various forms of biblical interpretation clearly and concisely for nearly twenty years. Yet, the tension and anxiety appear right in the table of contents, with "traditional methods of biblical criticism", "expanding the tradition", and "overturning the tradition". Full disclosure: as a rhetorical feminist critic, my methodologies fall into the expanding and overturning sections; however, I am an historian by training and teach the "traditional methods" of source and form criticism, along with the chapter on historical criticism. J. Maxwell Miller, the author of that chapter, describes the anxiety best in his conclusion:

Finally, the charge is being heard from several quarters that biblical studies in general, including historical-critical methodologies and treatments of ancient Israelite history, are biased to the core and should be approached from totally different perspectives . . . This bias in the ancient sources has only been exacerbated by religious leaders in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is charged, who usually have been men. Moreover, contemporary biblical scholarship in Western universities is decidedly Eurocentric—that is, culturally biased—in approach. An increasing number of studies are appearing that attempt to redress the situation. Some attempt to do this by uncovering and correcting the old biases. Others,

apparently liberated by the recognition of modern historians that complete objectivity is an unattainable goal anyhow, put aside even any effort in that direction and write essays on historical topics that unabashedly replace the old biases and ideologies with new ones". (Miller 1999, p. 32)

Miller recognizes the bias within the discipline and still has this lingering nervousness about what happens if folks not wedded to Eurocentrism start writing.

All scholarship has an agenda, including but not limited to this essay. So, the question is whose biases predominate and why. It is not surprising that Silberman's essay about Wellhausen appeared in *Semeia* but not in the *Journal of Biblical Literature (JBL)*, even though he was the 1982 president of the SBL (History 2021). *Semeia*, according to the SBL website, was "an experimental journal devoted to the exploration of new and emergent areas and methods of biblical criticism, . . . published from 1974 through 2002. Each issue was devoted to a particular theme, and articles explored the methods, models, and findings of linguistics, folklore studies, contemporary literary criticism, structuralism, social anthropology, and other such disciplines" (Semeia Journal 2021). Silberman's challenge of Wellhausen, while grounded in careful textual analysis, seemed "new and emergent". It did not appear in the *JBL*, "the flagship journal of the field" (Journals JBL 2021). That may have made sense in 1982; however, the ways in which scholarship is classified determines how it is perceived. Would the Wellhausen apology tour have happened if Silberman's article had appeared in the *JBL*, especially since his presidential address, "Listening to the Text", did (Silberman 1983)? Maybe, but there also might have been more pushback. The discourse around Wellhausen matters now because history and intersectionality must matter in Hebrew Bible studies.

In her 2015 article, "The Slippery Yet Tenacious Nature of Racism: New Developments in Critical Race Theory and Their Implications for the Study of Religion and Ethics", Susannah Heschel demonstrates why reckoning with history and bias is a prerequisite for any possible positive scholarly change. She warns that apologetics, even well-intentioned apologetics, can perpetuate racism—"Another example is Robert Morgan's defense of Christian theology from charges of anti-Semitism by developing a taxonomy of types of anti-Semitism that echoes the hermeneutics of taxonomy that dominate racist thinking" (Heschel 2015, p. 4). Heschel notes that in nineteenth-century Europe, those classified as other were a threat, not because of their physical characteristics "but the alleged moral degeneracy inherent in the body . . . Nature and physicality, moral depravity and racial inferiority, relate as soul and body, suggesting that racial theory functions as a kind of incarnational theology" (Heschel 2015, p. 6). Additionally, the Bible itself functioned as a rationale for Nazi theology, with the anti-Semitism inherent in that theology coming from a much older history of anti-Judaism (Heschel 2015, pp. 8–9, 13). This is why Wellhausen should not be given a pass for his own anti-Judaism. Contextual or not, he made anti-Jewish statements and created a hypothesis about the Hebrew Bible that partially depended upon them. As Heschel states,

Theology is always political. I have argued elsewhere that Christian supersessionism is a form of theological colonialism. In the domain of religion, Christianity colonized Judaism theologically, taking over its central theological concepts of the Messiah, eschatology, apocalypticism, election, and Israel, as well as its scriptures, its prophets, and even its God, and denying the continued validity of those ideas for Judaism. (Heschel 2015, p. 13)

Gruber argues that Wellhausen's anti-Judaism may have the same colonizing effects for Jews. I think Gruber's argument about the effects of colonialism may be applied to critical Hebrew Bible scholarship—until the anti-Judaism at the discipline's foundation is acknowledged, it cannot be uprooted and replaced. Words and ideas matter. As Heschel notes, "Among the Nazi theologians I studied, Christianity provided the Persilschein (a deceptive certificate falsely covering up Nazi activities) that excused their Nazi anti-Semitism; after 1945, they claimed to have merely described Judaism in traditional Christian

theological language, engaging in a legitimate theological critique of Judaism, and they were all denazified" (Heschel 2015, p. 17). That critique of Judaism had modern biblical critical support from Wellhausen's arguments about Israel and Judaism. Heschel's warning about the slipperiness and mutability of racism also functions as a call for examination of persons and structures, because "even as we repudiate racism, we may be unwittingly—or deliberately—perpetuating it" (Heschel 2015, p. 23). How much harm could an uncritical or apologetic reading of Wellhausen do to a Jewish scholar, for example? Jewish seminaries did not even teach the documentary hypothesis until after World War II because of Wellhausen's anti-Jewish statements (Levenson 2021).

The anti-Judaism that so often distorted modern Christian theology and scholarship should not be dismissed, particularly today when we recognize the ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, and religion shape what we study and why. Wellhausen was no exception, as a product of early modern Europe. In his day, religious practice and religiosity was reconfigured from a feminine to a masculine pursuit, particularly if struggle or crisis was involved (Tjeder 2011, pp. 130, 132–33; Baader 2012, p. 61). "Jesus' masculinity" became the model for his European male followers, a way to resist earlier assessments of Christianity as "dogmatic and superstitious, and hence utterly unbecoming a real man" (Tjeder 2011, pp. 135, 132). Additionally, Judaism in Germany faced a similar crisis of gender, but with mid-nineteenth-century German rabbis praising Jewish men for their feminine characteristics, just as their Christian contemporaries praised Christian men (Baader 2012, pp. 50, 64). The problem was that once German Christians returned to a masculine model, they continued to classify Jews and Judaism as the now negative feminine. As Benjamin Maria Baader writes, "They [Samson Raphael Hirsch and Adolf Jellinek] advanced the notion that Jewish men possessed particular feminine character traits, an idea that became a hallmark of the anti-Semitic discourse on Jews at the turn of the twentieth century" (Baader 2012, p. 51). What the Rabbis saw as positive, German Christians later weaponized against German Jews (Baader 2012, pp. 58–59, 63–64; Imhoff 2016, p. 129).

It is noteworthy that within Jewish scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Wellhausen's work and the larger historical issues it raised received different responses ranging from acceptance to rejection. Some Jewish apologists argued that liberal Judaism and Protestantism shared a common love of the prophets and therefore were not incompatible; others used Protestant critiques of Wellhausen for their own purposes (Shavit and Eran 2007, pp. 89, 106, 154). Regarding biblical scholarship, while Orthodox Jews rejected Wellhausen outright, some Conservative Jews like H.L. Ginsberg (1903–90) were more open to Wellhausen's hypothesis, and Reform Jews, who did not oppose the historical-critical method, engaged with his work, including Kaufmann Kohler and Julian Morgenstern (Brettler and Breuer 2015, pp. 298, 303–4).

Theological as well as historical context matter, however, because Wellhausen's Jewish contemporaries recognized then what Wellhausen's apologists today will not—if taken to its logical conclusion, Protestant biblical scholarship would have hastened Judaism's demise (Shavit and Eran 2007, p. 90). Wellhausen's work on the documentary hypothesis was viewed as an existential threat by Jewish scholars such as Avraham Hirschberg (Shavit and Eran 2007, p. 98, 107). This was in part because "those who accused him of anti-Semitism did not always distinguish between the documentary hypothesis and the historical and theological conclusions he drew from it in relation to the essence of Judaism" (Shavit and Eran 2007, p. 103). Additionally, this may explain why questions about whether and how to engage Wellhausen exacerbated an already existing debate within Judaism about the implications of historical criticism on belief in the Torah (Shavit and Eran 2007, pp. 122, 124, 126–28, 133, 136, 140, 146). Nevertheless, even obituaries written by Jewish scholars, including by colleague Hermann Cohen, recognized Wellhausen's problematic bias (Wiese 2005, pp. 279–80, n.190). Benno Jacob saw Protestant analysis of the Torah as "'not only un-Jewish, but anti-Jewish' and was biased in its attempt to 'disinherit Israel' by means of its religious historical scheme, i.e., to claim prophecy and the Psalms for

Christianity and burden Judaism with the ‘evil law’” (Wiese 2005, p. 224). Similarly, Max Wiener challenged Wellhausen’s view of Jewish religious development from particularity to universal ethics to fulfillment in Jesus and Christianity (Wiese 2005, pp. 243, 245–46). Jacob warned that Wellhausen and his followers were not engaging in objective scholarship but in an academic form of anti-Judaism (Wiese 2005, pp. 226–28). Time proved him right. For example, Friedrich Delitzsch’s argument that the Hebrew Bible was a substandard canon “[was] immediately exploited in the following years by anti-Semitic circles as a scientific legitimization of a racist rejection of the Old Testament” (Wiese 2005, p. 231). Delitzsch followed Kaiser Wilhelm’s argument that the new scholarship weakened Jewish people’s position as “God’s chosen” (Wiese 2005, pp. 232, n.40, 233). Even Hermann Gunkel’s defense of Judaism was limited to the Hebrew Bible, and he claimed that Protestant scholars could be more objective about the history of religious origins than Jewish ones (Wiese 2005, pp. 237, n.56, 238–39). As Christian Wiese concludes, “The Wellhausen image of history showed a conspicuous tendency to disparage the Old Testament tradition in favor of a claim to Christian superiority allegedly based on objectivity and thus to challenge Judaism’s right to exist” (Wiese 2005, p. 281). Hermann Cohen’s assessment of the situation at the time says it all: “Fairly and understandably, one cannot doubt that a still-living religion may never again entrust the study of its own sources to a scholarship that is actually and programmatically not simple scholarship, but rather wants to establish and reinforce its own religion, a foreign religion, through this scholarship” (ind. qtd. in Wiese 2005, p. 281).

While the reinforcement of Christianity is not a current objective of the SBL, the organization was founded in 1880, so the odds of it not being affected by the earlier German scholarship are slim to none (“Mission” 2021). The first known Jewish president of the SBL, Richard J.L. Gottheil, mentioned Wellhausen in his 1903 address entitled “Some Early Jewish Bible Criticism” (Gottheil 1904, p. 4, n.4). Max Margolis, president in 1923, warned against the movement in Germany to separate the Hebrew Bible from the Christian canon and called for a renewed focus on the study of Hebrew. He insisted that as scholars, they could not only criticize the ignorance of US clergy: “Let us search our hearts collectively. It is unnecessary to recall flippancy and downright coarseness of expression, as when one pokes fun at the Jew God enjoying his roast veal in Abraham’s tent and revealing himself to Moses a posteriori, or when another describes Jahveh as an ‘uncanny Titan,’ and a third speaks of him as immorally wicked” (Margolis 1924, pp. 4–5). By 1941, the coarseness of expression had become tragic. SBL President Julian Morgenstern stated that while “Germany was, of course, the cradle of biblical science . . . the Bible [now] . . . is in Germany a discredited and spiritually proscribed book” (Morgenstern 1942, p. 4). He did not mention why, only saying that the US would need to pick up the slack. Even Morgenstern kept silent about the ways in which scholarship had gone wrong.

5. Conclusions

Race and racism are modern constructs that do not appear in the Hebrew Bible. Additionally, race itself has no biological basis; however, the desire to categorize people and judge them is as old as the Bible itself. This Special Issue of *Religions* is in response to the upheaval and reckoning that took place in the summer of 2020 in the United States. While race and racism are often viewed in terms of black/brown and white, they do not have to be. Any system that creates a hierarchy based on color or ethnicity or religion, if that system has enough power, can easily be racist. The Holocaust is an example of racism taken to its genocidal conclusion. This paper chose to examine not a biblical text but a biblical scholar, as Alan Levenson asks, “Can you tell the history of Bible scholarship without telling the story of Bible scholars?” (Levenson 2021) I would answer no. If this current volume seeks to address how the Hebrew Bible has been used in exclusive and racist ways, then the story cannot be told or changed without dealing with Wellhausen.

As an African American feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, I would be doing myself and my discipline a disservice if I remained silent about Wellhausen. The history of the field is

not a “Jewish problem”. It is the challenge and the opportunity of all of us who work in a discipline that did not have us in mind back in 1880. When Steven McKenzie and John Kaltner edited a follow-up text on biblical criticisms in 2013, it included disability studies, postcolonialism, and queer studies. The title, *New Meanings for Ancient Texts*, recognized the changes in the field without categorizing them in relationship to “the tradition”. The tradition is what we make it. Sarojini Nadar argues that “feminist studies is, of necessity, an advocacy task first and foremost” (Nadar 2009, p. 138). Wil Gafney, writing about the influence of the Black Lives Matter movement on her scholarship, says, “I am more intentional in talking about whiteness and white supremacist culture and ideology and the roles of these elements in the founding and shaping of the West, of America, of public and private institutions, including those in which knowledge is constructed and passed on, and of the church and its institutions” (Gafney 2017, p. 207). Wellhausen and his legacy exemplify the ways in which white Christianity shaped and misshaped an academic discipline, and I have the opportunity to make this point and stand in solidarity with Jewish scholars who have made this point for decades. Gafney’s article notably appears in the *JBL*. As I write this paragraph in June 2021, the SBL home page includes a statement on Pride Month and a link to the 2020 #BlackScholarsMatter symposium. If the SBL wants to continue this movement towards inclusivity, a reckoning with the past is in order. It is not enough to add [insert minority group here] and stir, as my friend and colleague Jennifer Zachman calls some methodologically weak attempts in Gender and Women’s Studies. Problematic structures and ideas cannot simply remain intact, and asking or compelling scholars to adjust to or accept those structures and ideas is unreasonable. To expand the field means the field itself may fundamentally change. I hope that my discipline, to paraphrase how Kwame Ture always answered his phone, is ready for that revolution (De Witt 1996).

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