Who Wrote the Bible? Study Guide

Who Wrote the Bible? by Richard Elliott Friedman

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Bible as we know it today has existed for thousands of years. One of the most published books in the world, individuals often own more than one copy and possibly more than one translation. Standing at the core of two world religions, Christianity and Judaism, the Bible also rises to great literature and history. However, even with all the study that goes into the Bible, few people know exactly who wrote it.

Richard Elliot Friedman sets out in his book to rectify this situation. He first introduces the world of the investigative biblical scholar. For millennia all questions about the Bible had been suppressed and harshly resisted. In the middle of the eighteenth century, some investigators become published, and by the late nineteenth century, four authors of the Pentateuch are identified. The major Jewish and Christian world religions accept investigative biblical scholarship by the mid-twentieth century.

Four letters designate the authors of the Pentateuch—E, J, D and P. The E author always refers to God as El and the J author refers to God as Yahweh (mistranslated as Jehovah). The D author wrote Deuteronomy and the P author wrote priestly passages, especially lists of laws as can be found in Leviticus. Friedman identifies D as Jeremiah but does not have specific identities for E, J or P. A fifth person involved with the Pentateuch is the redactor or R, a person who brings all the texts together. Friedman proposes that Ezra is R.

Ancient Jewish history is central to Friedman's arguments. Two major areas develop, the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah. The Kingdom of Israel begins its own Temple in order that people there can more conveniently bring their livestock for sacrifice. While the Temple in Jerusalem uses cherubs to form the throne of God, the Temple in Israel uses cast golden calves for the same purpose. This split becomes contentious between the two priesthoods, the northern Israeli that honors Moses and the southern Judah that honors Aaron. These differences become reflected in the Bible and help to determine which text was written by whom.

Friedman emphasizes that investigative biblical study does not attempt to destroy anyone's faith. Rather, a greater understanding of the Bible and how it developed leads to greater possibilities for interpretation. For example, the notion of God as being both just and merciful arises due to the conflicts between two priesthoods, and as such may be a more accurate portrayal of God than either priesthood's stance.

Introduction Who Wrote the Bible?

Introduction Who Wrote the Bible? Summary and Analysis

The Bible as we know it today has existed for thousands of years. One of the most published books in the world, individuals often own more than one copy and possibly more than one translation. Standing at the core of two world religions, Christianity and Judaism, the Bible also rises to great literature and history. However, even with all the study that goes into the Bible, few people know exactly who wrote it.

In traditional belief, Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch. Other authors own traditional credit for other books in the Old Testament, but up until the past few hundred years, these traditions have been enforced rather than supported with evidence and logic. Members of the priesthood would learn the pat answers and simply accept them without question. Since most of the biblical studies were performed by the clergy, nobody had any reason to raise the question as to who actually wrote the Bible. Friedman explains his reason for writing his book.

"Such questions are important to understanding what the text meant in the biblical world itself. But they also offer an opportunity for producing a new and richer understanding of the book today, for both the religious and the nonreligious reader, once we come to know the persons and forces that produced it" (p. 17).

The author's purpose is not to disprove the Bible nor to promote doubt about the contents. He wants to help the reader to understand the Bible more deeply in light of modern investigations into the language of the original Hebrew, the history in which the books developed, and in respect to archaeological discoveries in the modern age. If this destroys someone's preconceptions, he does not apologize. Rather, he forewarns that what once was the traditional belief about the authors of the Bible does not hold up with the evidence and analysis that he presents.

Moses supposedly wrote the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—and although the books are about him, nowhere in the text does he take credit for their authorship, nor does anyone else give him authorship. Additionally, the books contradict themselves in mystifying ways, along with giving Moses credit for knowledge about things for which he could not possibly have had. Questions about these contradictions did come up as early as the third century A.D., resulting in the standard response that the contradictions are only apparent. This view leads to torturous exercises in logic. For example, one argument dismisses the impossible knowledge by claiming that Moses was a prophet, and thereby could see into the future.

During medieval times, newer explanations based more on logic than magic appear. Some investigators of that time suspect that someone added lines to the Bible here and

there. Isaac ibn Yashush notices in the eleventh century that the list of kings in Genesis 36, includes people who lived long after the death of Moses, so Isaac proposes that someone other than Moses must have written the list. This notion, along with others proposed over the years, does not gain any traction with medieval biblical scholars. Parts of books that contain these ideas are deleted. Whole books are banned and burned. However, certain observations about biblical language do begin to enter into literature as the centuries roll by. Thomas Hobbes points out in the seventeenth century that a certain phrase, "to this day," is one used by an author describing the past, not the present, in that something endures "to this day." Spinoza observes that Moses refers to himself as "the humblest man on earth," not exactly a humble thing for the humblest man on earth to say.

Today investigators know that the stories of the Bible are told twice. A single pair of stories is called a doublet. In some of these stories the deity is referred to as Yahweh (mispronounced as Jehovah) and in others simply as God. Other commonalities indicate that the two versions of the stories had at one time been separate, then cut and pasted together. In all, four authors of the Pentateuch are currently identified, which means that someone else had brought the four ancient texts together.

The author of the book that refers to Yahweh/Jehovah is called J. The author of the book that refers to God (Elohim in Hebrew) is called E. A third author, whose writing concerns priests is called P, and a fourth author of Deuteronomy is called D.

Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) develops a model of ancient biblical times that continues to stand as a strong synthesis of many earlier ideas and his own analysis. His model proposes three historical stages for the development of Israel, during which the documents that now compose the Pentateuch are written. J and E are the oldest of the books, having been written during a nature/fertility period. D comes from a spiritual/ethical period and P from a priestly/legal period.

By the twentieth century, the Catholic Church lowers its guard and accepts honest inquiry into the origins of the Pentateuch. Pope Pius XII encourages scholarly investigation in 1943. Protestants also accept biblical inquiry at Harvard Divinity School, Yale Divinity School, Princeton Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary. Jewish acceptance of inquiry is found at the Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Simply because a strong model exists and the major seminary institutions accept scholarly inquiry does not mean that the puzzle has yet been solved. The questions involved with biblical inquiry take on three main perspectives—literary, moral and theological.

The literary perspective involves the overarching question, why did the author write one way and not another? History, politics and motivations come into the puzzle. From the moral perspective the question becomes, why did the author write down these laws? For example, Deuteronomy lists laws to be followed in war, much of which goes against the common way of waging ancient warfare. Something must have caused this change,

and the puzzle is to determine what this might have been. The theological perspective grapples with the nature of God as described in the Old Testament. Why does God seem punitive at some times and merciful at others? Many such questions arise within the theological perspective.

Another perspective of the Bible involves only history. Does the author write from direct experience or from other sources? What events paralleled those described in the Bible? Modern archeology sheds much light on these and other biblical history puzzles.

Chapter 1 The World That Produced the Bible: 1200-722 B.C.

Chapter 1 The World That Produced the Bible: 1200-722 B.C. Summary and Analysis

The ancient land in which the Bible was written lies near the Mediterranean coast. It stretches southward from the area around the Sea of Galilee, a large freshwater lake, to that around the Dead Sea, actually a salt lake and named so because the salt content is too high to support life other than microbes. The Jordan River connects the two bodies of water and empties into the Dead Sea. The northern portion of this land is fertile, the middle mountainous and the south desert.

The ancient Israelites worshiped Yahweh, a god different from the other gods worshiped around the Mediterranean region. Rather than being associated with any particular natural force such as the wind, Yahweh stands in Israeli tradition as acting in history rather than in nature or myths. The ancient Israeli people speak Hebrew and write mostly on papyrus. They live in houses made primarily of stone, one or two stories high. Their diet consists of a variety of meat, vegetables and bread. They brew beer and make wine. Their history begins long before 1200 B.C., but no records exist of that earlier time.

Politically the ancient Israelites live in twelve tribes, plus a thirteenth that controls no land, being a priestly tribe that inhabits the cities of other tribes. This priestly tribe is named Levi. The other twelve consist of Asher, Benjamin, Dan, Ephraim, Gad, Issachar, Judah, Manasseh, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon and Zebulon. Besides the priests, judges control much of the politics among the ancient Israelis. A judge may be male or female and a military leader, and in times of war can acquire a great deal of power. A third high position is the prophet. Anybody can become a prophet due to being called by Yahweh to do something special for the people, whether this is political, ethical or delivering a new ritual.

Samuel is the last judge before Saul becomes king. The motivation for joining all the tribes together under one monarch comes from the military pressure of the Philistines. No one tribe can resist the Philistines, so all band together for mutual security. But King Saul does not rule as an absolute monarch. Tribal leaders, priests and especially prophets share much of the power. He has a falling out with Samuel, a prophet, which results in Samuel anointing King David. From David comes a dynasty of rulers that lasts longer than any other known in history.

When David becomes king, he does several very smart political moves. Aware that the other tribes fear too powerful a king, he moves the capital from his home area of Judah to Jerusalem. This helps to allay the fears of the people that he might rule with favor for the concerns of Judah. He then appoints two chief priests, one from the north and the

other from the south, which helps to unify the tribes. David marries women from several important regions, thus further unifying the tribes through human relationships. Finally, he hires a professional army. Soon an empire develops that extends from eastern Egypt to the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia.

Political intrigue mix with family relationships that go to dysfunctional extremes. David's oldest son, Amnon, rapes Tamar, his half-sister. Tamar's brother Absalom kills Amnon, which puts Absalom next in line for the throne. Absalom later tries to take the kingdom by force with an army mustered from among the people, but David's professional army defeats Absalom's amateurs. As David reaches his old age, other sons vie for the throne. In the end, Solomon wins without a fight.

David had ruled as a conquering leader, but Solomon rules as a peaceful leader, preferring to use diplomacy and trade rather than military might. The Israeli kingdom prospers, and he builds the Temple in Jerusalem, sixty cubits (eighteen inches = one cubit) long and twenty wide. Only priests were allowed in the Temple, which has two rooms—the first being the Holy and the second the Holy of Holies. The people gathered in the outer courtyard for ceremonies and sacrifices.

The Holy of Holies room is twenty by twenty cubits, and it contains two cherubs, that is, two statues of a four-legged animal with the head of a human and wings. The wings form a throne upon which the invisible Yahweh sits. Underneath the wings sets the ark, a golden box that contains the original stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.

The reign of Solomon runs into trouble because he favors the south over the north. The north shoulders more tax burdens, plus another payment in labor, than the south. On top of this, Solomon sells off part of the north. Upon his death, his son Rehoboam becomes king and continues the unfair policies. The north then secedes from the kingdom. Two kingdoms result—Israel in the north with King Jeroboam ruling from the city named Shechem, and Judah in the south with King Rehoboam in Jerusalem, though the kingdoms share a common religion. However, Jeroboam creates a variation of the religion by using golden calves (young bulls) rather than cherubs to surround the throne and refers to Yahweh as El or Bull El. This eliminates the need for his people to visit Jerusalem for religious reasons. He sets up his own priesthood that eliminates the Levites, who must go to Judah to find priestly positions. Jeroboam, in effect, fires the old priests and disenfranchises them from their ages-old powerful status.

In 722 B.C., Assyrian forces conquer Israel and disperse the tribes, known as the ten lost tribes of Israel. Judah survives for a hundred years more. However, during the two hundred years that the two kingdoms existed concurrently, two of the biblical authors live, J and E.

Chapter 2 J and E

Chapter 2 J and E Summary and Analysis

The first evidence that two people author part of the Bible is discovered in the eighteenth century by three people writing at three different times—Henning Bernhard Witter, a German minister in 1711; Jean Astruc, a French medical professor in 1753; and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, a German scholar in 1780. Eighteen years later, investigators discover that four writers had authored the first five books of the Bible.

The major difference between the J and E authors lies in the word for God. J always refers to Yahweh (mispronounced Jehovah) and E refers to God, El or Elohim. Differences in language usage, style and interests indicate that E has two authors, one of whom concentrates mostly on priestly issues. This third author is called P. The analysis holds up for the first four books, but Deuteronomy has no relationship to the first three authors, and so a fourth author becomes apparent, called D.

These discoveries create quite a bit of backlash from Christianity and Judaism, but not because four authors wrote the Pentateuch. The trouble is that someone had artfully stitched the books together, and people for two thousand years believed that Moses had written all five books. The change in traditional thinking is simply unacceptable, whether true or not.

Friedman offers an analysis of the flood story. He translates the story as it is presented in the Bible and highlights one of the authors through bold print. This author is P and the other J. The stories differ in word usage, the name of the deity and certain details. What seem to be contradictions become simply the differences in two versions of the same story from two authors. The nature of God differs as well, where the J version allows God to have regrets. In the P version God transcends the universe and controls it.

By the end of the nineteenth century this idea of four biblical authors takes on the name Documentary Hypothesis, also known as Higher Criticism. The puzzle had been discovered, but just how complex the whole can become is not yet known. A fifth person comes into view, a redactor (editor), who stitched the works together. Nobody knows who these people were, where they were writing, or what time in history they wrote. Some investigators hypothesize that groups of people had done the writing and redacting, not individuals.

Friedman proposes that J had lived in Judah and that E had lived in Israel, which is not a new hypothesis. He wishes to present stronger evidence for it. The first observation toward this end is that the E stories seem concerned with Israel and the J stories with Judah, the two kingdoms that had existed side-by-side for two hundred years.

The J story of Genesis places Abraham in Hebron, the capital city of Judah under King David. In addition, the land promised to Abraham stretches from Egypt to the Euphrates

River, which was the empire that David built. The E story includes the city Peni-El, which King Jeroboam had built in Israel. A striking difference exists in how the two authors approach the founding of Shechem, the capital of Israel. In the E story, Jacob buys the city. In the J story two of Jacob's sons take the city by massacring all the men within it.

The E story about the birth of Jacob's sons and grandsons include all the tribes that make up Israel. In the J story the only tribe that had territory during the time of the two kingdoms is named—Judah. Three other tribes that had lost their territory are named—Reuben, Simeon and Levi. J mentions none of the tribes of Israel. In E, Jacob bequeaths his land to his grandson, Ephraim, which also happens to be the tribe of King Jeroboam. In J, Jacob gives the land to Judah. Other pieces of evidence point to author E favoring Israel, while author J favors Judah.

Chapter 3 Two Kingdoms, Two Writers

Chapter 3 Two Kingdoms, Two Writers Summary and Analysis

Friedman builds the case that the author E favors Israel and is, in fact, from Israel, probably the city of Shiloh, through analysis of the Ten Commandments story. In the version that E writes, Aaron plays a significant role. He builds a golden calf and encourages the people to celebrate wildly while Moses receives the tablets from God. God wants to destroy the people because they worship a rival god, the golden calf, but Moses pleads for mercy. God grants it. When Moses returns to the people, he smashes the stone tablets. Aaron and the Levites kill everyone else.

The primary role of Aaron indicates the hero status that he has among the Israelites, while the golden calf image parallels the golden calves of the northern religion. The smashing of the stone tablets brings doubt that they exist in Jerusalem, thus discrediting the southern religion. However, use of the golden calf image discredits the north as well. Friedman proposes that author E is one of the disenfranchised Levite priests, who yearn to recover their positions of power.

The E author's commandment about making statues casts doubt on both the northern calves, which are made of cast gold, and the southern cherubs, made of olive wood plated with gold. On the other hand, the J author's similar commandment is to not make molten statues, which bans the north's calves but not the south's cherubs. In Numbers, J elevates the ark to high importance but E does not mention it. Instead E writes about the Tabernacle, or the Tent of Meeting, while J does not bring it up.

J uses the name Yahweh consistently, but E uses El until Moses asks God's name, which turns out to be Yahweh, also. Friedman takes this as more evidence that the author E is a Levite priest who lives in Israel. Friedman also hypothesizes that the Levites might have been the only tribe to have been enslaved in Egypt, but he acknowledges that this is still just a hypothesis. As for J, that author favors Judah and does all he can to avoid the covenant between Moses and God while emphasizing the earlier covenant between Abraham and God.

Despite the differences, both J and E have enough similarities that separating them on stylistic grounds fails. Friedman gives various explanations for this. The two authors may have been writing from an earlier document, just placing the people and events into molds that favor either Judah or Israel. Or the two authors may have been consciously imitating the language and style of stories common to both kingdoms. Another possibility is that one bases his version on the other. Friedman rejects the idea that the versions had been written by groups rather than two individuals.

Some evidence exists that the J author might be female. If so, she must be part of the nobility to have the status to write sacred text. Where E always keeps men as the main

characters, J writes about Tamar in Genesis 38. In this story Tamar's husband Judah treats her wrongly, and she finally wins an apology from him.

Friedman puts the dates of writing as J being from 848 and 722 B.C., and E from 922 to 722 B.C. As to why the two versions were combined, Friedman uses arguments regarding the respect for ancient texts and the social need for familiar stories to be retained. Had either J or E been cut out, either former Judeans or former Israelites would have complained. The combination of the two texts also symbolizes the reuniting of the Jewish people 200 years after the north and south kingdoms had existed.

Chapter 4 The World That Produced the Bible: 722-587 B.C.

Chapter 4 The World That Produced the Bible: 722-587 B.C. Summary and Analysis

After the fall of Israel in 722 B.C., Judah remains as a greatly-weakened country and a subject of more powerful empires. Judah stands as a gateway into Egypt and on a desirable trade route. Being under the dominion of other cultures with their own gods, the Judean king, by necessity, requires the priests to honor these foreign gods, but the priests highly resent such a move. Politically this works out to keep empires such as the Assyrian and Babylonian from simply crushing Judah and making the area its own territory. From a religious standpoint, the priests and prophets condemn the king as going against Yahweh's wishes. An additional major change is the evaporation of tribal leaders and the tribes themselves.

King Hezekiah, who rules Judah from 715 to 687 B.C., initiates religious reforms by cleansing the Temple of idols and designating the Temple of Jerusalem as the central place of worship. This necessitates the people taking their non-fish or non-fowl animals to Jerusalem for the proper slaughter that must be performed by a priest on an altar. One important biblical reference to a snake sculpture that Moses had built plays an important part in solving the puzzle of who wrote the Bible. According to one part of the Bible (2 Kings), Hezekiah destroys this sculpture.

This rebellion against the Assyrians brings a fierce military action against the Judean city of Lachish. Modern archaeological excavations at this site and at Nineveh confirm the biblical accounts, but the story of Judah from Nineveh never claims that the Assyrians take Jerusalem. Rather, the Judeans pay the Assyrians to abandon the siege of Jerusalem by both accounts. A probable reason for the failure of the siege is that Hezekiah had built a tunnel under the city to bring in fresh water.

Following King Hezekiah, first his son and then his grandson go back to the ways of following Assyrian religions. The idols come back to the Temple, and Jerusalem no longer serves as the center of Jewish religion. To the people, this is a great convenience, for they no longer need to herd their animals to Jerusalem for slaughter. Sacrifice can now be done locally.

King Josiah, Hezekiah's great grandson, goes back yet again to the reforms where the idols are cast away, and Jerusalem again becomes the center of religion. He does this because a priest discovers a scroll of the Torah, and upon reading it, King Josiah becomes very distraught and thus the reforms again. Meanwhile, Assyria's strength had ebbed, and now Babylon overshadows the empire, which is probably why no retaliation materialized from Josiah's reforms.

But then Egypt becomes an ally of Assyria. When Egyptian troops pass through Judah, Josiah confronts them. He is answered with an arrow, which kills him, and thus ends the independence of Judah and the religious reforms. Judah goes into a steady downward spiral that ends up with the population fleeing to Egypt as refugees in 587 B.C., and its religion in serious jeopardy of being destroyed.

Chapter 5 In the Court of King Josiah

Chapter 5 In the Court of King Josiah Summary and Analysis

"The book that the priest Hilkiah said he found in the Temple in 622 B.C. was Deuteronomy" (p. 101).

The above quote summarizes the overarching question about Deuteronomy. The traditional claim that Moses had written it comes into question when considering the political forces at work during the reign of King Josiah. Making Jerusalem once again the center of religion, and lending credence to this act by discovering a lost book of the Torah, works neatly into the desires of the priests in Jerusalem. Their share of the sacrifices is ten percent of all the animals and produce brought to them. In 1805, the German investigator W. M. L. De Wette asserts that Moses did not write Deuteronomy, and that the book had been written specifically to support Josiah's reformation. De Wette calls this deception pious fraud.

The evidence for a relatively recent writing of Deuteronomy is contained in the next six books of the Bible, also known as the Early Prophets—Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 2 Kings. In 1943, Martin Noth, a German biblical scholar, demonstrates that a strong similarity exists among these books and Deuteronomy, and that a single writer/editor had created the works. Noth refers to Deuteronomy and the six Early Prophet books that follow it as the Deuteronomistic history.

Friedman points out that the term testament is Latin for covenant, and the idea that God makes covenants with humankind is a central part of the Jewish and Christian religions. Three covenants are of importance—between Abraham and God, between Moses and God, and another with Moses on the plains of Moab after the forty years in the wilderness. The third covenant is the laws in Deuteronomy. One of the individual agreements that God makes with humankind involves the permanence of the family line for the kingdom, that of King David. The question then becomes, why did the author of Deuteronomy write this after the fall of Judah? The Davidic king Zedekiah loses the throne and becomes a prisoner in Babylon in 587 B.C.

In 1973, Frank Moore Cross, a biblical scholar at Harvard University, argues against looking for an author of Deuteronomy after 587 B.C. The phrase "to this day" is often employed in the text, indicating that the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah still existed while the author wrote. Cross proposes that Deuteronomy had been written during the reign of King Josiah when things were looking rosy for the kingdom. Then after the fall of Judah, another author had simply added a brief history in 2 Kings about the kings who followed Josiah and the fall of Judah. Other direct references to King Josiah indicate that the first author had been writing during Josiah's reign. Just why the second author did not edit out obvious contradictions—those that reference existing people and structures such as the Temple that were no longer in existence—is unknown.

Friedman mentions an ironic twist. A colleague of Cross', G. Ernest Wright, does not accept the argument that two versions of Deuteronomy exist. Wright counters that no covenant of God can ever be unconditional. He assigns one of his students to research and defend this view. This student turns out to be Friedman, who now argues for Cross' view of Deuteronomy. Friedman goes onward to list eight pieces of evidence that support Cross' argument. Exploring whether the wording style used is also used for similar actions, Friedman looks at the description of Hezekiah versus Josiah because they had done similar things. The wording is entirely different for Hezekiah, while the wording for Josiah is almost identical as that used to describe Moses.

Friedman places the writing of Deuteronomy in Jerusalem and the date of its writing around 622 B.C. from the evidence he has presented so far. His next task is to identify who the author of Deuteronomy was, the author D.

Chapter 6 D

Chapter 6 D Summary and Analysis

The contents of the law code presented in Deuteronomy gives clues as to the identity of the author. The first law is to worship in a central place. This brings the slaughter of animals other than fish or fowl from all over the land to the priests in the central place where they take ten percent of the sacrifices. Another important part of the law is to protect Levites. Levites also gain jurisdiction in legal matters.

Friedman, while referring to a paper that Baruch Halpern presented to the Harvard Near East Department in 1974, eliminates the possibility that a king had written Deuteronomy because the law restricts how much wealth the king can possess, among other restrictions that a king would not likely impose upon himself.

The evidence indicates that the author of Deuteronomy is a Levite of Shiloh. The laws do not mention Jerusalem or the ark, but they do put rural Levites out of business in favor of those in the central place of worship. However, the laws also call for everyone to support the disenfranchised Levites.

The prophet Jeremiah writes his book in much the same way that Deuteronomy had been written. The language is so similar that Halpern gives credit to Jeremiah for writing Deuteronomy. Other known facts about Jeremiah support this conclusion as well. Jeremiah had been a Levite priest of Anathoth and had never done sacrifices, because the central place for sacrifices was Shiloh according to the laws in Deuteronomy. He also mentions the bronze snake of Moses, which none of the other prophets do.

A connection exists between the author D and E. Both refer to the mountain where Moses receives the Ten Commandments as Horeb, not Sinai as authors J and P write. Expressions such as "causes his name to dwell," "place where Yahweh sets his name," and "causes his name to be mentione" are common between D and E. A major difference between D and E and the authors J and P is the attitude toward Aaron. The priests of J and P regard themselves as descendants of Aaron and look upon him in a positive light. D and E descend from Moses and see Aaron in a negative sense. Friedman refers to the priest of J and P as the "Aaronid family of priests" (p. 128). He calls D and E "Shilonite priests" (p. 129) and associates them with scribes.

The identification of biblical insertions depends upon two or more of the following clues being present—wording, grammar, syntax, theme and literary structure. Friedman draws the Deuteronomistic history from these identified insertions that serve to glue several books together into comprehensive stories. The books of Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 2 Kings contain these insertions. The common theme involves God giving direction, humankind disobeying and being punished, and humankind repenting, after which God grants forgiveness. Other themes emphasize loyalty to

Yahweh, the nature of the Davidic covenant, the centralization of the religion and the Torah.

Chapter 7 A Priest in Exile

Chapter 7 A Priest in Exile Summary and Analysis

After King Josiah dies, Judah falls and the Judeans become exiles in Egypt, the first edition of Deuteronomy stops making sense. The family that was supposed to have the throne of Judah forever, guaranteed by God, no longer has the throne. The one central place for worship is burned to the ground. Somebody had to fix the text for it to reflect the new and disturbing reality. Freidman compares this problem to a modern hypothetical situation.

"Probably the nearest modern analogy would be if someone who admired the American President John Kennedy assembled a history of the United States from George Washington to Kennedy, constructing the story to climax in Kennedy's presidency as a culmination of things past and as the beginning of something new and hopeful. And then the president's early death left that history ironic and obsolete, even painful to read. It would not be enough just to add a chapter or two at the end, briefly describing the next few presidencies. Rather, someone would have to go back through the work and make changes at critical points so that it would no longer point so specifically to Kennedy. The changes would have to prepare the readers for the new ending and provide a context in which to understand the new events" (pp. 136-137).

References to being exiled appear throughout the text of Deuteronomy, which prepare the reader for the fact of exile. The reason given for the exile is that the people worshiped foreign gods, which goes against the First Commandment. King Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh, is given all the responsibility for this sin, and so the exile, although generations later, was inevitable.

The revised edition of Deuteronomy explains that the exile to Egypt is a punishment, but not a destruction, of the covenant of Moses because God is merciful. As for the David covenant, the throne may be gone but the potential of someone from David's line taking the throne still exists. This opens the way for a messiah, the implications of which impacts Judaism and makes possible Christianity.

When Jeremiah goes into exile in Egypt, a scribe named Baruch probably goes with him. Baruch is mentioned in the book of Jeremiah as writing for Jeremiah. Friedman speculates that Jeremiah may have written the poetry and Baruch the prose. However this worked out, the language in Deuteronomy matches almost exactly that in Jeremiah, and the author D is likely Jeremiah. Friedman also attributes the additions to Deuteronomy to Jeremiah.

Chapter 8 The World That Produced the Bible: 587-400 B.C.

Chapter 8 The World That Produced the Bible: 587-400 B.C. Summary and Analysis

This period of history is difficult to understand because there is very little written history in the Bible and virtually no archaeological evidence as to what happened to the Jews in Egypt and Babylon. Friedman speculates that the nature of the Jewish religion acted to hold the Jews together, even while outcasts in foreign countries. The monotheistic nature of the religion makes it unique among the pagan religions of the day, in which deities interchange easily. This exchange among pagan people makes little difference to the core ideas that the deities represent, such as natural forces.

Regarding what living in exile is like for the Jews, mention of the hardships and guilt are found in Psalm 137, the book of Lamentations, Ezekiel, and the last parts of Jeremiah and Isaiah. However, as Friedman reminds the reader, nobody can truly understand what exile is like unless having experienced it first hand.

" . . . We would have to imagine seeing the defenses of the city where we have lived all our lives torn down. All the public buildings and all the most beautiful homes are burned. The religious leaders of our community are executed. The national leader's children are butchered in from of him, then his eyes are put out, and then he is led away in manacles. We are carried away in a group of thousands, probably never to see our country again. And then we live as outsiders in our conquerors' country. It is a horror" (p. 151).

Guilt comes into play with monotheism. If the Babylonians had only been tools of God to punish the Jews for breaking the Moses covenant, that what had they done that was so wrong as to be exiled? The answer is in the books. They had worshiped false gods. The troubles expand with no leadership of a king and no Temple for worship. The only upside to the exile is that it lasts fifty years, not hundreds.

Babylon had conquered Egypt while the people of Judah were in exile, and then the Persians conquer the Babylonians in 538 B.C. Cyrus the Great of Persia allows the Jews to return home. They rebuild the Temple with one big difference—the Temple does not contain the cherubs or the ark. The ark just stops being a part of the story. No mention is made as to what happened to it, nor have archaeologists found it. The new Temple is finished and dedicated on Passover, 516 B.C. Another difference is that the struggle between the priesthoods is over with the Aaronids taking over all the priestly responsibilities and positions.

In 458 B.C., Ezra arrives in Judah from Babylon with a copy of the Torah that is in modern usage. He is a priest, a scribe and, along with Nehemiah, the designated

governor of Judah—now a province of the Persian Empire. As such, Ezra rebuilds Jerusalem and leads the people back to the Jewish faith as presented in his copy of the Torah, which he claims is completely written by Moses. This notion carries through for millennia. However, Friedman is convinced that four authors wrote the Torah, and the last one left to identify is P of the priestly class.

Chapter 9 A Brilliant Mistake

Chapter 9 A Brilliant Mistake Summary and Analysis

The brilliant mistake involves the identification of the P, or priestly, author of the Bible. Friedman asserts that in any scholarly investigation, mistakes are bound to be made. He suspends his judgment regarding earlier biblical scholars because what they had done correctly outweighs their mistake, and the mistake itself had led to a better understanding of who wrote the Bible.

Time frame holds the central place in the brilliant mistake. For many years, scholars had considered that J and E had come from an early period during the time of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. Also, D was considered originating in the middle period, which was during King Josiah's time. The question then became when was P written? This represents the vast majority of the Pentateuch, about the same amount of writing as the other three sources put together.

In 1833, Professor Eduard Reuss maintains that the prophets do not mention P and in fact seem unaware of this source. He places the P author during the time of the second Temple, after the Persian Empire gives the land back to the people. This is the first part of the brilliant mistake, the misplacing of P in history. Reuss publishes about this mistaken placement in 1879.

A student of Reuss, Karl Graf, argues for this view of P. The problem with the Graf's argument is that P never once mentions the Temple as having any importance, and, in fact, the temple is not mentioned at all. What is mentioned is a Tabernacle, and Graf concludes that the Tabernacle was actually a code name for the Temple. However, the Tabernacle is actually a tent that Moses had used. Its main purpose was to house the ark, and in P, this Tabernacle is referred to over two hundred times, much more often than in E (three times). J and D do not bring up the Tabernacle. In addition P gives detailed information on the construction of the Tabernacle and explains that this is where the people regularly gather.

Graf and others see the Tabernacle as a device to link Moses with the second Temple, and thus give authority to the new laws.

". . . How could this writer compose a story in which God gives Moses laws about a Temple when no Temple was actually built until over two hundred years after Moses was dead? In order to make anyone believe that the Priestly laws came from Moses' quill, the second Temple writer had to invent some device that would connect the era of Moses with the era of the Temples. The Tabernacle was that device" (p. 164).

That the Tabernacle was a fiction, a pious fraud, is the second part of the brilliant mistake.

Julius Wellhausen draws the ideas of Graf, De Wette and other biblical scholars together. He then adds the third part of the brilliant mistake, which is the idea that P assumes that religion is centralized. He builds other arguments to support the placement of P during the time of the second Temple.

"Wellhausen's picture was very attractive. It placed a priestly source in a priestly period. It identified guilt sacrifices and holidays of atonement in a period of guilt and atonement. It placed Ezekielian ideas in the period that came right after Ezekiel. It explained the concentration on the Tabernacle in P in terms of the period of concentration on the Temple. It was logical, coherent, persuasive—and wrong" (p. 167).

Friedman argues that the prophets did indeed know about P and that Jeremiah is hostile toward the priestly author. In Ezekiel, the prophet refers to P when indicting the people for not following God's laws. He also gives instructions for rebuilding the Temple, while P gives details on the Tabernacle. Professor Avi Hurvitz of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem shows in 1982, that modern linguistic analysis places P earlier than Ezekiel because the Hebrew used in P is an older form. Further linguistic analysis places P before the exile to Babylon.

Using logical analysis of arguments, Friedman neatly unravels Wellhausen's thinking about P being written after the exile. However, Friedman does accept one of Wellhausen's observations—the answer to the puzzle lies in how the Tabernacle had been used.

Chapter 10 - 11 The Sacred Tent, P

Chapter 10 - 11 The Sacred Tent, P Summary and Analysis

Graf and Wellhausen base their argument that the P source wrote during the time of the second Temple on a pious fraud, where the Tabernacle is actually the second Temple. Part of the argument is based on the listed the dimensions of both the Temple and the Tabernacle. Friedman shows that there is no direct scaling of one to the other in terms of the three dimensions of length, width and height, but he does indicate that the Tabernacle is smaller than the first Temple. As for the second Temple, the Bible gives no dimensions. No directly stated dimensions of the Tabernacle are given either.

A key part of understanding how the Tabernacle was set up involves wooden frames that form the walls. Each frame is one and one-half cubits wide. Friedman proposes that the frames overlapped by the one-half cubit, and so the dimensions become 20 cubits long by 8 cubits wide by 10 cubits high. He then describes the first Temple as having two rooms, the Holy and the Holy of Holies. The dimensions for the Holy are 40 cubits long by 20 cubits wide. The Holy of Holies, which contained the cherubs that were 10 cubits high, was a square room, 20 cubits long by 20 cubits wide, and of some height. The important piece of evidence that Friedman concludes from this is that the Tabernacle actually existed inside the Holy of Holies room beneath the wings of the cherubs.

After giving further evidence that the Tabernacle had actually been a tent used before the first Temple and placed within it after it was built, Friedman proposes that this places the author P during the time of the first Temple, not the second.

Up to this point Friedman has made the case that P lived at some time between the fall of Israel in 722 B.C., and the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., a span of 135 years. This person is likely an Aaronid priest and therefore male. He also lives in Jerusalem. The stories of P closely parallel the stories of J and E. Now Friedman draws the connection between P, J and E.

After the fall of Israel, many refugees enter Judah and arrive in Jerusalem. The assimilation of these people goes well, since the religion of the north is nearly compatible with that of the south. But differences do exist. The former priests of the north trace their ancestry back to Moses, while P traces his back to Aaron, the first Jewish high priest. The treatment of Aaron in biblical stories reflects the different views on who was more important, along with other variations. J and E differ as well but not as much as they both differ from P. In the end, all the stories become stitched together into one Pentateuch, which may have been a compromise to please as many as possible and perhaps nobody in particular. For the time that the Aaronid priests have power, they simply write a Torah of their own but must tolerate the earlier versions of J and E.

Friedman gives several pieces of evidence toward this interpretation of P. Where J and E refer to Moses and Aaron as belonging to the same Levite tribe, P makes them siblings of the same parents, and places Aaron as the first born. P claims that the custom of sacrificing arises when Aaron becomes the high priest. In J and E, many instances of sacrifice are mentioned before this time. P either leaves the sacrificing out or cuts the entire stories in which sacrifice is mentioned. The story of Noah and the flood has more than two of the sacrificial animals on board in J and E because after the flood, sacrifices must be made. In P no such sacrifices are needed because Aaron is not yet the high priest, and so only two of each animal is needed.

At times, the two versions of a story mingle into a confusing storyline that jumps from one location to another and switches antagonists and protagonists. Friedman gives an example of this for a rebellion story, Numbers 16. He separates the two texts by using bold typeface for the P version.

The importance of sacrificing becomes apparent. The P author, an Aaronid priest in Jerusalem, believes that the people must come to Jerusalem and bring sacrifices, of which the priests claim ten percent. On the other hand, the sacrificing in J and E are done anywhere that is convenient. The idea of God in P is that of a dispassionate and just deity, but J and E refer to God as being gracious and merciful. The P author promotes the priestly class as being the common people's connection with God, while God deals directly with people in J and E. Sacrificing for J and E is a means of giving thanks and ensuring a good future. For P sacrificing is a means to ask forgiveness for sins and also a means of making an income and maintaining social-political status for the priests.

The author P faces an important task. Being of the Aaronid persuasion, he must put Moses in less of a commanding role while bringing Aaron up a few notches. He does this in Numbers 20:2-13. Where the JE text describes Moses as following God's direction to obtain water from a rock with his staff, P casts this act as disobedience to God. As a result, both Moses and Aaron suffer death before the people reach the Promised Land. However, Aaron suffers because of Moses' sin, not his own. In Numbers 25, P takes another stab at Moses by changing the women who tempt the people into sex and worshiping a pagan god from being Moabite at the beginning to being Midianite at the end. The wife of Moses had been a Midianite.

Another characteristic of P's text is the removal of stories that tell about dreams, talking animals and angels. The story of Adam and Eve is missing, along with angels who visit Sodom and Gomorrah, and Jacob's wrestling with God. P adds quite a bit of law—half of Exodus, half of Numbers and almost all of Leviticus. This serves to establish the authority of the Aaronid priesthood.

Chapter 12 - 13 In the Court of King Hezekiah, The Great Irony

Chapter 12 - 13 In the Court of King Hezekiah, The Great Irony Summary and Analysis

Friedman makes the case that the Deuteronomistic writer, Jeremiah, knew about JE and P. He attacks P as being from "the lying pen of scribes" (p. 209), which reflects Jeremiah's dislike of the priestly class that makes laws to keep him out of the priesthood and casts Moses in a bad light. That Jeremiah knows about P indicates that the P stories had been written before 609 B.C., which is when King Josiah died.

By going on the fact that P puts its emphasis on centralized religion, Friedman concludes that P was written during King Hezekiah's reign, during which time the centralization of religion was of great importance. The P priesthood also prefers Aaron over Moses.

Although the P texts seem to be written by one person, the laws given likely arose from other texts, according to Friedman. The inclusion of lists of laws among stories may strike the modern reader as strange, but for the ancient Jews this made perfect sense. Literature categorization had not yet expanded beyond ancient Greece. In another sense, whether the Bible is considered literature or history today was of no consequence to the ancients. Both literature and history jumbled together because that is simply the way books were written.

The great irony is that after P went to so much trouble creating a Torah for the Aaronid priesthood, somebody came along and combined J, E, D and P. The author P does not like JE, and the author D does not like P. Within this intrigue, the authors J and E write earlier than P and D. The JE texts probably originated in oral tradition, but the PD texts did not have enough history behind them to have originated as oral traditions. Additionally, the combination was done so artfully that hardly anyone suspected for thousands of years.

This person who merged the books is called the redactor, or R. Not much is known about the redactor, but Friedman believes him to have been an Aaronid priest or somebody closely aligned with the Aaronid priesthood. Every book of the Pentateuch begins with P stories. Another piece of evidence involves the Book of Generations that had at one time been a separate priestly work. R inserts parts of this book within Genesis. Friedman goes on to argue that R was likely a priest too.

One priest who was well positioned to bring the Pentateuch together is Ezra, who lived at the right time and had the authority to do so.

". . . there actually was an ancient tradition about Ezra and the Torah of Moses. The tradition says that the original scroll of the Torah (and other books of the Bible) was burned up in the fire that destroyed the Temple in 587 B.C. but that Ezra was able to restore it by revelation. This tradition is preserved in a work called the Fourth Book of Ezra. This book is not part of the Bible. It is rather part of the collection known as the Pseudepigrapha, which are works written by Christians and Jews between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. The Fourth Book of Ezra comes from around 100 A.D. . . ." (p. 224).

Ezra's motivation probably had to do with the texts to be combined having been part of the religious culture for hundreds of years. He could not simply drop J, E and D in favor of P. Whether he liked it or not, he had to include the famous stories that were supposedly all written down by Moses. R could not drop Moses for Aaron.

R deals with the problems with contradictions and multiple versions of stories by weaving some of them together but also keeping some separate. This leaves the door open for rationalizations for why the Bible seems to contradict itself in some places and obviously does in others. Rather than being the result of multiple authors and multiple source documents, the belief that what seem to be contradictions are, did not actually gain enough credence and authoritative support to keep down critics for many years.

The first Bible consisted of eleven books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samual, 1 and 2 Kings. Where Deuteronomy leaves off in the Pentateuch brought together by R, Joshua picks up and continues onward toward the other books. This represents the entire early history of Judaism, contains the traditional biblical stories, and encompasses much of the Jewish faith.

Chapter 14 The World That the Bible Produced

Chapter 14 The World That the Bible Produced Summary and Analysis

Friedman draws the history of the Bible and how its authors created something worth far more than the sum of its parts. The story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son Isaac appears in Genesis 22, written by E. Somewhere around a hundred years later, author P writes the story of Abraham buying a cave in which to bury his wife Sarah after her death. This appears in Genesis 23 and was put there by R, the redactor. The impact of this placement gives the interpretation that Sarah had died of grief over her son's imminent sacrifice credence, even if E, P and R may have had no such intention. This can be observed in modern literature as well. Oftentimes modern authors write more into their stories than intended, thus taking literature past the realm of good into great. Intention matters not at all because the impact on readers is what truly counts.

The mixing of creation stories also provides more opportunity for interpretation, whether reverent or cynical. J puts Adam, who is created in the image of God, into Eden with Eve, who becomes tempted by a snake to eat of the forbidden fruit. P does not mention the fruit or the snake, but the story that holds in many people's minds is the one about the fall from grace due to temptation. Had R dropped the J story, the creation as a whole would have been less influential in how religions based upon the Bible developed.

The nature of God also becomes mixed between two broad takes. The vision of God that E, J and D have is of a personal deity who actually appears as a man. The vision of P places God outside the creation but having power over it, such as making the flood happen. J centralizes the creation around earth, while P puts the earth within the heavens. Taken separately, the two visions of God are obviously different, but when R combines them, God takes on a dual nature. The biblical God is both very personal and transcends the universe. The God of P is just, while the God of J, E and D is merciful, and when brought together, God becomes both merciful and just. This parallels human parents disciplining their children, and so an understanding of the unfathomable draws within reach.

The point that Friedman makes is that the Bible is indeed an organic whole. It can be taken apart and shown to be a synthesis of several ancient texts, but the Bible also stands on its own. Taken separately, the parts of the Bible that had been combined and edited together give only a part of the overall picture, which Friedman suspects is the reason why so much resistance to biblical analysis arose, similar to the early medical dissection of human cadavers. One cannot consider a part of the human body to be the human being, nor can a part of the Bible be considered the whole work of literature, history, law and theology.

However, understanding how the Bible developed from ancient oral traditions and texts leads to a better understanding of why the Bible is constructed the way it is. This understanding can, in turn, lead to new interpretations for those who consider the Bible to be sacred, a better understanding for those who approach the Bible as literature and history, and for everyone a greater appreciation of how the Bible impacts the present world.

Characters

Biblical Investigators

The history of biblical investigators is much shorter than the history of the Bible, spanning a few centuries instead of millennia. At first considered a threat to religion, these investigators instead created a rational view of biblical authors that accomplishes just the opposite—a deeper appreciation for the Bible and what it has to say about the nature of God; the impact of law; the ancient cultures and politics in which the Bible was written, and the Bible's importance in the world today. Whether one believes in the existence of God or not, the existence of the Bible is irrefutable and so is the importance of the book in world history. For this analysis, the biblical investigators are placed foremost because Friedman bases his arguments upon the works of men. Placing the names of God afterward implies no disrespect and merely reflects the primary subject matter of Friedman's book. The Bible is about God. Friedman's book is about the men and one woman biblical author (possibly J).

Julius Wellhausen makes a strong case that still holds today. He proposes that the Bible was written during three major stages of ancient development, consisting of a nature/fertility period, a spiritual/ethical period and a priestly/legal period. Before this, Isaac ibn Yashush notices that some kings listed in Genesis 36 had lived after the death of Moses. Thomas Hobbes points out that certain phrases in the Bible strongly imply time contradictions. Spinoza finds another oddity, that the humblest man on earth (Moses) would actually refer to himself in this manner, which is not the act of a humble man. By the late eighteenth century, biblical scholars know about the four authors of the Pentateuch—E, J, D and P. In the early nineteenth century, W. M. L. De Wette argues that Deuteronomy had been written to support King Josiah's reformation, and therefore Deuteronomy could not have been written by Moses. Frank Moore Cross supports this take on the authorship of Deuteronomy in 1973, and adds that the book also has two parts, one before the fall of Judah and additions put in after the fall. Baruch Halpern argues that no king could have written Deuteronomy because of the restrictions of the laws on what kings can own and how much money a king can retain. Karl Graf thinks that the Tabernacle is a code word for the Temple, but Freidman puts forth a case against this conclusion.

Today biblical scholars freely embrace the idea that four authors and a redactor created the first five books of the Bible. This idea also extends to the next six books that comprise the entirety of the Jewish Bible. None of this investigation has negatively impacted religion, other than demonstrating that the words in the Bible are not the infallible words of God. In essence, the Bible is not to be worshiped any more or less than the golden bull calf. Objects are not to be worshiped, but God is. On the same level of spirituality, humans are not to be punished for seeking the truth about any imaginable subject. Through the courage to seek the truth, the present understanding of the Bible has reached a level of near certainty. Nevertheless, inquiry into the origin of the Bible continues. Biblical investigators have not yet put themselves out of their jobs.

Moses

Moses was given credit for writing the entire Pentateuch before modern biblical scholars discovered that four people had written this part of the Bible. An additional editor called the redactor brought the books together. Authors E and J show Moses in a positive light and Aaron in a lesser role. Author P elevates Aaron and lessens Moses in order to establish the priesthood in the Kingdom of Judah.

Still, Moses plays an important role in the Pentateuch. He leads his people out of slavery, spending forty years in the wilderness with them. During this time, Moses climbs the mountain where God gives him the Ten Commandments carved onto two stone tablets. When he returns with the tablets, he smashes them because the people have turned to worshiping a golden calf. He is later punished for using his staff to get water from a rock. This, at least, is one version of the story. Another version does not mention the golden calf and does not have God punishing Moses for obtaining water from a rock.

The two different viewpoints of Moses arise from two rival priesthoods. The Mosaic priesthood of the north, consisting of Levites, honors Moses. The Aaronid priesthood of the south honors Aaron. Meanwhile both priesthoods acknowledge the existence of Moses and his forty years in the wilderness.

The Tabernacle plays an important part in the stories about Moses. The Tabernacle is a special rectangular-shaped tent in front of which all important religious activities take place. Only priests are allowed inside the Tabernacle, and this is where the ark containing the Ten Commandments tablets is kept. Later, once out of the wilderness, the Tabernacle may have been kept inside the second Temple. Moses dies before his people reach the Promised Land and so never sees either the first or second Temple.

El

El is the name of God that the author E prefers to use. This characteristic, along with other clues, help biblical investigators to identify the author E's writing. The name El refers to a bull, and E writes that young bulls are used rather than cherubs in the Kingdom of Israel to form a throne for God.

Yahweh

Yahweh is the name of God that the author J prefers to use. This characteristic, along with other clues, help biblical investigators to identify the author J's writing. In a German translation from Hebrew, this name was misspelled as Jehovah, and so the J designation.

J

J is one of the authors of the Pentateuch and is distinguished from the others primarily by the use Yahweh as the name of God. From a German translation of the Hebrew, the mispronunciation "Jehovah" resulted in the letter designation for this author. Since J could have been a judge, and since women were allowed to be judges, this author might have been female.

E

E is one of the authors of the Pentateuch and is distinguished from the others primarily by the use of El as the name of God. The E stories are the ones that tend to portray God as walking upon the earth with men, include the Adam and Eve story, and puts Jacob in a wrestling match with God.

D

D is the author of Deuteronomy and parts of the rest of the Pentateuch. Friedman identifies him as Jeremiah. Jeremiah also likely pulled together or wrote the next six books after the Pentateuch. The style of D tends toward a just, but transcendental, God who never walks upon the earth with men. Snakes do not talk in D literature either.

P

P is one of the authors of the Pentateuch and is distinguished primarily from the others in several ways, among them an emphasis on law, the centralization of religion, a positive emphasis on Aaron and a subtly negative portrayal of Moses. Leviticus is an example of P literature.

R

R is the redactor, or editor, who brings all the texts of the Pentateuch together in a way that blends the multiple authors together. Friedman identifies the redactor as Ezra and gives the author much credit for the skillful and artful blending of the texts.

Kings

King Jeroboam and King Rehoboam rule the ancient Kingdom of Israel and Kingdom of Judah. During this time, the Jewish religion begins to pull in different directions, with the northern Kingdom of Israel creating its own Temple. This situation falls apart when both kingdoms fall. King Hezekiah tries to centralize the religion in Jerusalem before the fall of Judah. After the end of exile, King Josiah again centralizes the Jewish religion. The political movements all have effects on how the final Bible turns out.

Objects/Places

The Bible

The Old Testament is the primary subject of the book. According to Friedman and many of his fellow biblical scholars, the first five books of the Bible had been written by more than one author, as opposed to the traditional belief that Moses had written them.

Pentateuch

The Pentateuch consists of the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Four authors wrote in these works and a redactor edited them together.

Torah

The Torah is what people of the Jewish faith call the first five books of the Bible. Friedman uses the terms Torah and Bible interchangeably.

Sea of Galilee

The Sea of Galilee is a central geographical object where the ancient Kingdom of Israel existed until its fall in 722 B.C.

Dead Sea

The Dead Sea is a central geographical object where the ancient Kingdom of Judah existed until its fall in 587 B.C.

Jordan River

The Jordan River connects the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, which is one of the most saline bodies of water in the world.

Tribes

The ancient Jews belonged to several tribes—Asher, Benjamin, Dan, Ephraim, Gad, Judah, Issachar, Levi, Manasseh, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, and Zebulon. The Levites were priests in the ancient Kingdom of Israel and held no land.

Israel

The ancient Kingdom of Israel existed until 722 B.C. when the Assyrians conquered it. Authors E and J most likely lived in this kingdom.

Judah

The ancient Kingdom of Judah existed until 587 B.C. when the Babylonians conquered it. Authors D and P most likely lived in this kingdom.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem was the central place of worship in the ancient Kingdom of Judah. Centralization is a primary theme of author P.

Tabernacle

The Tabernacle is a special tent that Moses uses while in the wilderness. It becomes a special structure in the Holy of Holies, according to Friedman, which is a square room in the back of the first Temple.

Temple

The Temple exists twice in Jewish history, first in the ancient Kingdom of Israel and again in the ancient Kingdom of Judah. The Temple consists of two rooms, the larger one to the front called the Holy and a smaller one in the back called the Holy of Holies.

Themes

Investigative Biblical Study

For thousands of years, the Bible was considered the infallible word of God. Even among certain modern, fundamentalist churches, this attitude is still extant. However, thinking people might be able to accept the existence of God on a leap of faith, but not the infallible nature of any book. People write books, and people are fallible. The early investigators found themselves censured or worse for their efforts to point out obvious contradictions in the Bible. The resistance to any critical analysis of the Bible persisted until the seventeenth century.

By the mid-twentieth century, the infallibility of the Bible is abandoned by all major Jewish and Christian religions. Obvious contradictions, even within a single story, indicate that more than one person had written the Bible. This has never been a big question regarding the New Testament, only the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the multiple writers are obvious and well-known. Some investigations into the early versions of the various books are done, but nothing to the extent of investigation into the Jewish Bible. The big puzzle about the Old Testament, the Jewish Bible, is that if multiple ancient people wrote the books, when did they write, where did they write, and who were they?

In support of his conclusions and proposals, Friedman presents ancient Jewish history and the findings of earlier biblical investigators. He follows logic and a type of scientific method for his arguments. This is quite different from the early studies of the Bible, where pious men accepted everything as true regardless of contradictions. The mind exercise in this kind of study involves the invention of rationalizations to explain away any questions. Friedman handily rejects this method of biblical study as being pointless. Instead he argues that a God who is both just and merciful, both personal and transcendent, enriches the human perception of the nature of God.

The Bible that Friedman presents is not the story of a terrible God full of vengeance, but of a God with two sides formed by two major factions of the ancient Jewish priesthood. One faction desires a decentralized religion, and the other wants it centralized. One honors Moses and the other Aaron. One emphasizes law over stories, while the other emphasizes stories over law. Despite the conflicts of the time, a whole Bible emerges that is larger than the sum of its parts. The authors of the Bible probably had no idea how important thisbook would become.

Human Nature

It is in human nature a drive to worship divinity in some manner. Few cultures have developed without religion as a central part that often blends with government, or even precedes government. People have a strong desire to believe in one or more gods.

Another part of human nature is to preserve self-interests. The priests of ancient Israel and Judah feud among themselves. The Judah priests throw the Levite priests out of power, but maintain a lower rural priest status for them. The Levite priests do not like this but have little choice. Thus the Mosaic writings of the Levites, E and J, become denigrated by the later writings of the Judah priests, D and P. The point is not to further refine the nature of God but to preserve newfound power and status.

Ironically major religions arise from the Jewish Bible. The political conflicts of the past are forgotten, and the belief that Moses had written the Pentateuch with his own hand becomes common, even mandated. The part of human nature at work here is a stubborn and oftentimes irrational defense of belief. The more strident, loud and, perhaps, violent the defense is, the weaker the belief. Such beliefs cannot hold up within the realms of investigative biblical study due to the facts not leading to the beliefs.

Religion and Politics

Religion and politics in the ancient Jewish world blended together, as they sometimes do in the modern world. One of the functions of government, the making of laws, becomes the province of first judges and then priests. The priests literally lay down the law with the authority of God behind them. The ancient kings wielded little influence on these laws but did take responsibility for defending the kingdom. King David does this well with his army of professional mercenaries and builds an empire. Subsequent kinds do not do so well, resulting in the fall of the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah. The ancient Jews become exiles in Babylon and Egypt. The priests lose all their influence.

Despite the loss of all political power, the exiled Jewish people probably held together through religion. In this sense, religion has a better survival rate than governments. When the former Soviet Union banned all religions, people still worshiped as they saw fit secretly. Once the USSR fell apart, religion came back to the various countries. The same happens in ancient Israel. Once the land is given back to the Jewish people, the religion comes back, too, but in a somewhat modified version. Since the Judah priests again hold power, Jerusalem becomes the center of worship, and Aaron is written into the Bible as a hero.

The ancient Jewish religion stands out in the ancient world because it does not follow the structure of the pagan religions of the time. Only one God exists in the Jewish religion, not a major god and a pantheon of lesser gods. As a result of this, the political conquests threaten to dissipate monotheism in favor of polytheism. This illustrates how being different from other religious beliefs can be detrimental politically. The ancient Jewish people would not easily assimilate into polytheistic religions, and one can imagine the resistance to doing so being fierce, especially among priests.

The economic impact of religion cannot be taken lightly either when considered within the context of politics. Making Jerusalem the center of the Jewish faith means that everyone across the land must bring their cattle there for slaughter or go without any

meat except for poultry and fish. Jerusalem thus becomes a center of commerce because of religion. Meanwhile, the centralization reduces rural, Levite priests to being near beggars. Without religious centralization, they could perform sacrifices locally and take their ten percent fees.

In the United States, a debate continues on how strictly religion should be separated from government. At the core of this debate is the historical fact that religion and politics have always been intertwined, and the observation that religion often dominates government and politics. This situation is termed a theocracy, a government model common in the Middle East. In the ancient world, all governments and religions intertwined freely, and the Jewish Bible reflects how tightly history, literature, theology and law were joined.

Style

Perspective

Richard Elliot Friedman holds a doctorate degree in theology and is a professor of Jewish studies. He has participated in an archaeological dig at Jerusalem as well. This is the second edition of his book about who wrote the Bible, and in it he adds more about Jeremiah in Chapter 7.

Friedman writes for the average reader. His prose is lighter than most other academic authors, thus making his possibly startling conclusions about who wrote the Bible more accessible, and hopefully more acceptable, given that many people form their opinions on this in early life. The arguments that he builds leave room for other conclusions, although his is a voice of authority on the matter. He never resorts to authority alone while working out what he calls the puzzle.

With a nod toward those who consider the Bible to be sacred, Friedman approaches the Bible as the work of men who lived in societies during ancient times. They may have been extraordinarily talented writers and poets, but they were still men with human drives and ambitions. These viewpoints very likely set badly with those who claim that everything in the Bible is the true and divinely-inspired words of God, but the evidence for Friedman's ideas clearly exist within scripture, related ancient texts and from archaeological discoveries.

Tone

Friedman uses a direct and approachable tone. He avoids dropping into pedantic lectures crawling with archaic terms, and when he uses jargon specific to his field, he tries to define what he means. This frees the reader to concentrate on the arguments that Friedman presents, which he does so in a logical movement from specific knowledge to conclusion. Where the known facts do not lead to a clear understanding, he admits to not knowing exactly who did what. Never does he stridently insist that the reader uncritically accept an idea.

The use of illustrations is slight and carefully placed. Friedman only employs visuals where they either bring out a dramatic point, such as the seal of Baruch, or to help in understanding the text. This works exceptionally well for illustrating the construction and nature of the Tabernacle tent and how the cherubs had been arranged in it.

Neither apologetic nor arrogant, Friedman's tone acknowledges how important the Bible is for many people. He breaks down incorrect beliefs about the Bible with logic and respect, such as every word in the Bible must be absolutely true. Simply pointing out the changes in the stories that contradict each other is enough of an argument to indicate that this cannot be true, and so an investigative mind must find some other way of explaining the contradictions. The strongly-implied premise that Friedman works from is

that people in the ancient world were much the same as people today. They needed to worship, but they also needed to make a living. They were victims of forces far beyond their control and so suffered from guilt. But they also held strongly to their traditions, even if the traditions themselves changed, such as the shift from Mosaic to Aaronid emphasis in the priestly class. Overall, Friedman's tone is sympathetic for human frailties and highly respectful of human courage. He leaves the issues of the nature of God up to the theologians, although he does bring up, without judgment, what the scriptures have to say about that.

Structure

The book consists of a long and informative introduction followed by fourteen chapters. The chapters first develop the historical setting in which the Bible had been written, then identify as much as is known about the authors of the Bible. The authors can sometimes be identified by place, time and name. Other times only the place and time is known. Friedman uses to good effect, the chapter structure like a novelist. He leads the reader on with intrigue and the promise of answers. By referring to the overall question of who wrote the Bible as a puzzle, Friedman strengthens this approach.

Following the chapters is an Appendix, Notes on Identification of Authors, Notes, a Selected Bibliography, Acknowledgments and an Index. The Appendix assigns the authors of the Bible to specific chapters and versus. The Notes section contains the numbered references in the text. The Selected Bibliography provides the background research should readers care to learn more on the subject, while the Acknowledgments section pays homage to those who helped in the creation of Friedman's book. The Index does the usual job of helping to find information quickly. The overall structure is that of a useful textbook for an introductory, college-level class on the history of the Bible.

Quotes

"Thus from the work of a great many persons, and at personal cost for some of them, the mystery of the Bible's origins had come to be addressed openly, and a working hypothesis had been formed. It was a remarkable stage in the Bible's history. Scholars could open the book of Genesis and identify the writing of two or even three authors on the same page. And there was also the work of the editor, the person who had cut up and combined the source documents into a single story; and so as many as four different persons could have contributed to producing a single page of the Bible. Investigators were now able to see that a puzzle existed and what the basic character of the puzzle was. But they still did not know who the authors of any of the four old source documents were, when they lived, or why they wrote. And they had no idea who the mysterious editor was who had combined them, nor did they have any idea why this person had combined them in this complex way" (pp. 23-24).

"The discovery that the Torah of Moses was really four works that had once been separate was not necessarily a crisis in itself. After all, the New Testament also began with four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—each of which told the story in its own way. Why then was there such a hostile reaction, among Christians and Jews, to the idea that the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) might begin with four "gospels" as well? The difference was that the Hebrew Bible's four sources had been combined so intricately and accepted as Moses' own writing for so long, about two thousand years; the new discoveries were flying in the face of an old, accepted, sacred tradition. The biblical investigators were unraveling a finely woven garment, and no one knew where these new investigations would lead" (p. 53).

"Sunday school versions of this story often try to vindicate Jacob. With slight changes or reinterpretations, they make Jacob the good son and Esau the bad one. But the J writer was more sophisticated than his later interpreters. He told a story in which Jacob was courageous and clever, but also dishonest. He did not make his heroes perfect (any more than the Court History of David made David perfect). His task was rather to compose a story that reflected and explained the political and social realities of the world that he knew. Anyone who reads the stories of Jacob and Esau can see how well he succeeded" (p. 69).

"There is still much to be discovered about who wrote J and E. We do not know the precise dates when they lived, and we do not know their names. I think that what we do know is more important. We know something about their world and about how that world produced these stories that still delight and teach us. Still, we may be dissatisfied until we can be more specific about the writers. So let me turn to source D. We can know even more about the person who assembled it than about those who wrote J and E—perhaps even his name" (p. 88).

"The biblical world's landmarks seem to be its disasters. The historical junctures that begin and end this chapter are the fall of Israel in 722 and the fall of Judah in 587 [both B.C.]. Perhaps this tells us more about the perceptions of modern historians than about

the biblical world. Or perhaps it tells us that great historical crises played critical roles in the formation of the Bible. In any case, we should still note that the years between 722 and 587 were not unceasingly bleak. These were times of powerful persons and great events, of the rise and fall of great empires. This period included times of hope and vision, especially, it appears, during Hezekiah's and Josiah's reigns. These times produced an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, and an Ezekiel. . ." (pp. 99-100).

"This was the trail of clues that my predecessors and I followed through the Bible in order to know when and where to look for the person who gave us Deuteronomy and the next six books of the Bible. Now we knew when: around the year 622 B.C. And we knew where: Judah, almost certainly in the city of Jerusalem. The question that still remained was: who?" (p. 116).

"There was one other person who was connected with King Josiah and the Deuteronomistic history. This person's association with them confirmed the Shiloh connection, and it brought us a step closer to knowing the Deuteronomist's identity. The person was the prophet Jeremiah" (p. 125).

"One thing that Jeremiah does not appear to be is a fraud. And indeed he and Baruch were no frauds, pious or otherwise. The Deuteronomistic historian built his history around the Deuteronomic law code, which was an authentically old document, and which he may well have believed to be by Moses himself. He used other documents as well, and he fashioned a continuous history out of them. His own additions to that history gave it structure, continuity, and meaning. His last chapters told of events that he had witnessed personally. There need not be anything fraudulent in any of this. Quite the contrary. It rather appears to be a sincere attempt, by a sensitive and skillful man, to tell his people's history—and to understand it. The historian painted his people's heritage. The prophet conceived of their destiny" (p. 149).

"The period of restoration, the age of the second Temple, appears from biblical and postbiblical sources to have been a time of dedication to the book as never before. Why? Presumably because political authority was now more in the hands of the priests, who had more of an interest in it than the kings had had. Perhaps, also, the book came to be especially treasured by the people at this time because it was a link to the past. It was the connection that meant for the ex-exiles that was a rebuilding, not just a new start. As a work of history, it gave a feeling of heritage from an extraordinary past. As a work of law, it showed a way to participate in the covenant—which is to say, in the heritage—in the present" (p. 160).

". . . In fact, the period after the fall of Jerusalem is, if anything, the hardest time to imagine the creation of such a holiday, because there is a matter of promulgation. If the Day of Atonement was made up because of the people's feelings of guilt after their fall, how could the writer of P's laws possibly have hoped to convince anybody that is was an ancient law? Who would have believed that it was written by Moses but somehow unknown to anyone until after 587 B.C., just when they happened to be feeling guilty? It is easier to picture successful promulgation of new laws in the days of the first Temple,

when religious reforms such as those of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah were presenting new laws and newly discovered documents" (p. 172).

"A tent inside a building is not so strange as it might seem. If ancient Israel had a Tabernacle that was its sacred shrine for years and was traditionally associated with Moses, they could hardly just discard it once a Temple was built. What do you do with a structure that is valued in your tradition and regarded as the proper place for religious ceremonies? A fairly close analogy might be the case of the bridal canopy used in Jewish weddings. The bride and groom stand under a canopy used in Jewish weddings. The bride and groom stand under a canopy during the ceremony. Presumably this custom began when weddings were performed out of doors, as they are in Israel to this day. In the United States, however, weddings are performed in synagogues; nonetheless, a canopy is still set up inside the synagogue in accordance with tradition and law. Try to do without the canopy inside the building, and there will surely be an angry grandmother insisting that she was married under a canopy, and her mother was married under a canopy, and her granddaughter will most certainly be married under a canopy. To make the analogy even a bit closer, imagine that it is a particular canopy that has been used in the same family for two hundred years. So it was with the Tabernacle. And, even more than in the case of the bridal canopy, the Tabernacle was regarded as the only one of its kind, connected with Moses himself" (p. 186).

"Now we know that the collection of Priestly laws and stories was conceived and written as an alternative to JE. JE's stories offended the Priestly writer's ancestor Aaron. They did not emphasize law. The did not emphasize priests. They contained elements that the Priestly writer rejected: angels and anthropomorphisms, dreams and talking animals. The Priestly writer was not happy with JE—to put it mildly" (p. 207).

"The redactor, whom I identify as Ezra, has been the least appreciated of the contributors to the Five Books of Moses. Usually, more credit is given to the authors of the stories and the laws. That may be an error. The redactor was as much an artist, in his own way, as the authors of J, E, P, and D were in theirs. His contribution was certainly as significant as theirs. His task was not merely difficult, it was creative. It called for wisdom and literary sensitivity at each step, as well as a skill that is no less an art than storytelling. In the end, he was the one who created the work that we have read all these years. He assembled the final form of the stories and laws that, in thousands of ways, have influenced millions" (p. 232).

"In the combined biblical text, God is as torn as any loving parent. He makes a covenant with humans, and the contract has terms. When they break the terms, his immediate just response could be anything from termination of the covenant to the arrival of any of the horrible entries on the covenant curse lists in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. But his mercy nearly always delays and/or tempers his execution of justice" (p. 240).

Topics for Discussion

Describe the four authors of the Bible—E, J, D and P.

Why does the Bible contain contradictions?

What motivates the Levi priesthood?

Give evidence that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch.

Define the term doublet.

What does Friedman propose is the relationship between the Temple and the Tabernacle?

Describe a cherub.

What is the significance of the golden calf?

What happens to the ten lost tribes of Israel?

What are the differences between a centralized and decentralized ancient Jewish religion?

What are the purposes of sacrifice?

Why does the Jewish God have a dual nature?