

# Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Lecture 13

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## Place of Centralization of Worship in Wellhausen's Reconstruction of Israel's Religious Development

### A. The Place of Centralization of Worship in Wellhausen's Reconstruction of Israel's Religious Development

#### 1. Importance of Centralization of Worship in Wellhausen's Hypothesis

Let's start again. We'll spend the rest of our time today and then next week on "Deuteronomy and the Centralization of Worship," Roman numeral IV on your outline. Capital A is, "The Place of Centralization of Worship in Wellhausen's Reconstruction of Israel's Religious Development." What I want to discuss here is what role that concept, centralization of worship, plays in Wellhausen's full scheme of things. I think that few Bible students realize that the rather innocent looking phrase in Deuteronomy 12, which occurs a number of times (in verse 5, 11, 14, and so on), "the place which the Lord your God shall choose," we are confronted with probably the major problem of modern Old Testament studies. That seems rather amazing, but I think that can be said. In that one little phrase, "the place which the Lord your God shall choose," you are confronted with what is probably the major problem with modern Old Testament studies.

The reason for that is this phrase concerning the legitimate place of worship was the key to Wellhausen's work on Israel's history, which was published in 1878. In that volume known as *The Prolegomena of the History of Israel*, that phrase is the key to the first part of that book. The first part of the book provides the foundation for everything else in it. That book, *The Prolegomena of the History of Israel*, became the great turning point in Old Testament studies in the last century; and despite criticism of certain details of Wellhausen's system since that time, and despite various changes in methodologies of historical research, that study has retained a dominant position in Old Testament studies right up till the present time.

## 2. Wellhausen's System – Deut. 12 Accepted by Some Evangelicals

In Wellhausen's system, Deuteronomy 12 really is the springboard for his whole approach to the history of the religion of Ancient Israel. Now what makes this even more remarkable is, for the most part, the way Wellhausen exegeted Deuteronomy 12 would find the acceptance of many Bible believing exegetes. In other words, there are many evangelicals who would agree with Wellhausen's exegesis of Deuteronomy 12. He read Deuteronomy 12 in the sense that all the offerings of Israel were to be brought to one sanctuary, a central place of worship. Of course, that would be in the kingdom period when all the sacrifices would be at the temple. At that time any altar outside of Jerusalem was *per se* illegitimate. There was only one legitimate place for the bringing of sacrifices. If someone brought a sacrifice somewhere else it was not legitimate because it was not brought to the place that the Lord had chosen. So according to Deuteronomy 12, in Wellhausen's view--but according to many evangelical interpreters as well--Deuteronomy 12 demands centralization of worship. All sacrifices are to be brought to the one, central, sanctuary temple.

There are evangelicals who would say that by the time the temple was built, it became this. In other words, prior to the building of the temple sacrifices took place other places depending on where the ark was. The tabernacle was there and moveable but when it was finally settled in Jerusalem then that was the only place. If you're willing to say that, it doesn't mean you're buying into all of Wellhausen's scheme of things, but as far as the exegesis of that passage, you're saying it says the same thing he says.

So that reading of Deuteronomy 12 would say that the temple possessed exclusive rights. It was forbidden to worship at any other place but that one sanctuary. The only point in which Wellhausen then and certain Bible believing interpreters would differ is that while Bible believing interpreters would say Moses wrote Deuteronomy 12, Wellhausen says it was written at the time of Josiah. Both say it's saying the same thing but the point of difference is: Did Moses write it or was it written at the time of Josiah? Wellhausen would say it wasn't written until the time of Josiah in 621 B.C. because he was the first person to rid the land of all the high places and to restrict and centralize

offerings to the one place, the temple in Jerusalem. Wellhausen places it in the time of Josiah. Bible-believing people say its origin was Moses, but what it is saying is basically the same.

### 3. Source Criticism and Deut. 12

So on the orthodox side you have a date somewhere between 1400 to 1200 and with Wellhausen a date of 621 B.C. Now his reason for dating in 621 was that in his view this regulation was impossible to conceive as existing any earlier. He wasn't original in that assumption he followed the view of de Wette who had defended the same viewpoint 70 years before the time of Wellhausen. The interesting thing is that de Wette didn't receive much attention for his view, whereas Wellhausen picks up de Wette's idea and uses it to restructure the whole field of Old Testament studies. Why the difference? I think it centers in this: There had been a lot of attention prior to Wellhausen's time given to source criticism. There were a lot of people who divided the Pentateuch into sources and tried to isolate these sources. But that source criticism really only became tremendously influential after Wellhausen picked up on it and added what was called the "P" document and put it later rather than early. At the same time he made the Josiah date of 621 and the finding of the book of the law, which he understood to be D, or Deuteronomy, to be the keystone of his theory. So you had J, E, D, P. A lot of people previously had isolated the same P document, but they put it earlier while Wellhausen thought it was later than D at 621. He got these documents put in that sequence, and that convinced many people that here is a theory that really explains the way the Old Testament was written and the way the religion of Israel developed. Now why was that?

### 4. Wellhausen's 3 Phases of the Place of Worship

#### A. Multiple Altars not Linked to a Specific Place

Let me try and give you an idea of what Wellhausen did, or tried to do. It's complex, but let me try and boil it down. His theory was based on the view that when you study the historical sections of the Old Testament, you can see that ideas about the

place of worship went through three discernable phases. The first phase, he said, was when the altar was not linked with any specific place. In other words, in the time of Judges and Samuel you find many altars in use located at many different places. No one seemed to have any objections to altars being located anywhere. Wellhausen said in that period of time early on there was a close tie between religion and life. Religious observances could be held almost anywhere. He said later that there was a desire to give a divine sanction, or approval, for the places of worship by asserting that their origin was due to an appearance of the Lord at that particular place.

For example, you have an altar at Bethel. Well, why would you have an altar at Bethel? Then you would need to get an etiological legend to explain why you have an altar there. Then the explanation was generated that God appeared to Jacob at Bethel, and that then is why there is an altar at Bethel. But you see that the story comes after the fact, reversing the way we understand it. There really was an appearance of God to Jacob at Bethel. So there was an altar to commemorate that. Wellhausen said it was the reverse. People just worshiped anywhere and then later they developed stories to justify why there were altars at certain places. But in that early period he said there's no thought of being bound to one place to the exclusion of all others. So you have in the first phase the multiplicity of altars. The cult then, he says, was spontaneous, and in any situation in life where there was a desire to give an expression of thanksgiving, you build an altar and you could do that most anywhere.

#### b. Early Prophets Opposed Unbridled Cult Centers in Favor of Ethical Living

But then a change began to set in, and he said this began with the influence of the early prophets such as Amos and Hosea because these prophets began to criticize these kinds of unbridled cult centers. He feels that in the early days of Israel that there wasn't much difference between the Canaanite cult and the Israelite cultic rituals. Probably Yahweh was just a form of heathen worship, just another variety. But under Amos and Hosea criticism began to rise against this unbridled cult. The prophets promoted their great discovery that worship was not the offering of the blood of bulls and goats, but

rather it was ethical living. So you see with the prophets what Wellhausen said is they weren't so much interested in cultic activity such as going to the altar and making sacrifices and performing the rituals. They're not interested in that. They were interested in ethics.

It's not that they opposed the multiplicity of altars as such, but they saw a danger in a religion that placed so much stress on the cult. By the cult I mean outward forms of ritual. Because there's a danger in that then because it's possible the moral demands of God don't get their due. People just go to the altar and perform the ritual and don't pay much attention to ethical and moral standards. So under the preaching of these prophets the high places, he said, began to lose their significance, the high places being the places where the altars were.

Then in connection with that prophetic development you have a political situation in which Jerusalem comes to the foreground, particularly after the fall of Samaria and the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. You don't have competition from the Northern Kingdom with regard to cultic observances. The altars at Bethel and Dan, of course, had been erected by Jeroboam at the time of the division of the kingdom to keep people from going south. That's all gone now. Isaiah comes to the south at about that time in the 700's and proclaims the supremacy of Jerusalem and the temple, and he receives a vision in the temple in his call in Isaiah 6. He gives prominence to Jerusalem. So all those things together led to a second phase in which Jerusalem's temple is assumed the dominant place of worship.

Now, he said the people initially were aware you can't just abolish the entire cult and centralize it in Jerusalem; that's asking too much. People are too attached to the local altars, and so forth. But he says, there was an attempt at reformation and concentration of worship, and in that he feels that the priests and the prophets worked together. Otherwise, he felt, they were deadly enemies. The prophets were basically against the cult. But he says the priests in Jerusalem would have acquired great material gain from a concentration of the worship in the capital so it was to their advantage. The prophets were interested in the same thing, not because they were fundamentally opposed

to the multiplicity of altars, not that, but their monotheistic concept of God could only really triumph when there wasn't a god of Bethel and a god of Beersheba and a god of these various other sites.

c. Centralization in Jerusalem by Josiah 621 BC but it failed

What he is saying there early on is they did have all these local deities connected with the altars of these various places, but the prophets came along and were interested in ethics. It was they who had this monotheistic concept, and this centralized the place of worship. It fit much better for the prophets to have a centralized sanctuary than a multiplicity of places to worship. So that you get the coalition of prophets and priests coming together by the time of Josiah where they attempt to wipe out worship anywhere other than Jerusalem and to exalt Jerusalem as the only valid place to worship and sacrifice. He says that's what happened in 621 when that law book was found in the temple. That was the attempt to bring all legitimate worship to Jerusalem, and that was what Deuteronomy 12 required.

But he says that attempt was doomed to failure because the people were too attached to the old holy places scattered through the land. As soon as Josiah died, therefore, worship returned to the many holy places and altars. He said that reformation would never really have had much of an effect at all if it hadn't been for the exile to Babylon. We see 621 is not much before the exile in 586 B.C.; you're only 30 years later or so.

d. Post-Exilic the Centralization in Jerusalem Succeeds

The Southern Kingdom was destroyed and the Jews were forced into exile to Babylon. The people were uprooted, and that not only meant the cessation of the existence of state of Israel as a political state, but the whole worship system was broken off because the temple was destroyed. Israel remained in exile for 70 years until Cyrus the Persian gave the edict for return in 539 B.C. You have a whole generation that had never been able to sacrifice in Babylon, in a foreign country. They had not grown up with

the old practices of an earlier time. So as that generation returns, you have a generation of people who really could carry out the earlier reform ideas, and thus you reach the third phase in his scheme. That is when you have a complete break in the past, and the people then come back and no longer think of using the old high places scattered through the land, but they think of bringing their worship only to the central sanctuary in Jerusalem.

## 1. Wellhausen's 3 Phases of Legal Codes

### a. Exod 20:24-26

So you see his three phases are: You have the first phase of multiplicity of altars. Gradually you move into that second phase, and ultimately in 621 in Josiah's time you had reformation and the attempt to centralize worship. But it was a failure. You don't reach that stage until after the exile when the people return when that's almost taken for granted that they would only worship in one place.

Now, what Wellhausen said was that not only did the history of Israel's religious development move in those three phases, but he found the same three phases in the Old Testament legal codes. I mentioned that earlier. What he said was that the altar law of Exodus 20:24-26 corresponds to the first phase. Exodus 20:24-26, that's in the Book of the Covenant. It is the JE code. It says, "An altar of earth you shall make me and shall sacrifice thereon your burnt offerings, your peace offerings, your sheep, and your oxen, and all places [plural] where I record my name, I shall come unto you and I will bless you. And if you will make me an altar of stone, you shall not make it of hewn stone, for if you lift up your tool upon it, you will pollute it. You shall not go up steps unto my altar lest your nakedness be exposed." So Wellhausen advanced the altar law of Exodus 20:24-26 corresponded with the first phase of Israel's history. So the law of J and E corresponds to the historical situation represented in that early period prior to 621 B.C.

### b. Dueter. 12 Destruction of Pagan Altars and Centralization

Deuteronomy 12, however, he says commands the destruction of the heathen places of offering and commands that the Lord be worshiped in the one place that he

would designate for worship. That's where you get to this expression that occurs in verse 5 as well as a number of other places in the chapter where it says, "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations that you possess serve their gods; overthrow their altars." Verse 5: "Unto the place that the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes he will put his name there for his habitation shall you seek him, and he shall come." Now he connects that statement of that chapter to the second phase of historical development, to the time when Josiah promoted his reformation and centralization of worship. So that's the "D" law code.

#### c. Post-Exilic Centralization is Assumed

Then that leaves only "P". So you have in the "JE" code--multiplicity of altars, and "D,"--centralization, that really failed at that time. That leaves only "P," and according to Wellhausen, "P" is clearly later than "D" because in "D" centralization is commanded, and that reflects a situation in which existing, contrary practices must be fought. He says "P" no longer stresses this issue. "P" just considers it so normal that only one place has the right to be the place of worship according to it. So he finds the post-exilic "P" material from the same background historically as the historical material of the third phase after the return from exile. So the entire "P" source he dates from after the time of the exile, or post-539 B.C.

#### d. Wellhausen's Method Summarized

So he finds those three phases and he finds those results in the history and the law and confirmed by a lot of other things that would take us too far astray to talk about. But notice he has from that one firm date: 621 B.C. He then works forward and back from 621, and the whole structure gets its date from 621 and the time of Josiah's finding of the book of the law. The result wreaks havoc on the entire Old Testament. If you look at that, you see what Scripture places under the name of Moses is from a much later time. Even the "JE" (Exodus 20:24-26) material is from the time of Joshua, Samuel, and Judges. "P" would be large parts of Exodus and almost all of Leviticus, primarily Leviticus.



e. Problem with Wellhausen's Approach – No Tabernacle

That's where it gets into the fallacy of what he's doing. He make the claims of each document [J, E, D, P] inclusive, in reference to the centralization of worship. You can go back to Mosaic legislation where it says three times in a year all your males are to appear before me at all your major festivals. It seems like that necessity has to be in the central sanctuary. The tabernacle where the ark was certainly had the supremacy, but that didn't mean necessarily that there wasn't legitimate worship centers elsewhere. I think that is a mistake. He puts it sequential; you move from multiplicity to one. My impression is that he would deny centralization was early on. If you read the account at the division of the kingdom where Jeroboam sets up the sanctuaries of Bethel and Dan, he states in the narrative of the 1 Kings that he built those altars because he didn't want the people going down to Jerusalem. Wellhausen says that has to be historically inaccurate because there was no centralization of worship at the time of Jeroboam. Centralization didn't develop until the time of Josiah and, therefore, to talk about people going to Jerusalem at the time of Jeroboam is an anachronism. So it has to be inaccurate because it doesn't fit his scheme.

Remember, in Wellhausen's scheme there never was a tabernacle. According to Wellhausen, that is material that is constructed on the model of the temple by the late "P" source then projected back into the early period by someone living in the exile as being where Israel worshiped during what we would say would be pre-temple times, during the time of the tabernacle. He said the tabernacle never actually existed.

He doesn't deny the existence of the temple, so he wouldn't deny Solomon built the temple, but what I'm saying is prior to the time of the construction of the temple. According to Wellhausen all the material of the tabernacle was a retrojection of a late idea modeled on the temple but then put back in pre-temple times. That fits with his scheme of multiplicity of altars and multiplicity of authors. So there was no tabernacle. So anything that talks about the tabernacle is a fabrication, or pious fraud.

The only tabernacle that existed, according to Wellhausen, is in the wilderness and is that tent of meeting that is referred to in Exodus 33. After the golden calf incident, it says in Exodus 33:7, “Moses took the tabernacle and pitched it outside the camp, and called it ‘the tabernacle of the congregation.’ It came to pass that everyone who wanted to seek the Lord went out to the tabernacle which was outside the camp.” Now that can be very confusing because the tabernacle hadn’t yet been set up. It was built, or set up, sometime later in Exodus. So this tent which is called here “the tent of meeting” that was pitched outside the camp by Moses, Wellhausen says that was the only “tabernacle” that ever existed. All the rest we read is pieced together later and projected back into that context by later writers. All we can say about Exodus 33:7 is Moses pitched the tent where God met him before the tabernacle was built. Of course, Wellhausen tries to set up a contradiction between this, and I think all we can say is that God told Moses to set up a tent, and this continues the discussion about Moses and his interceding for the people of Israel; but there was a tent where Moses met with the Lord.

Alright, as I said this whole three-phase development of history and law just wreaks havoc on the whole Old Testament because what the Scripture places under the name of Moses is without exception placed in a later time. What in the Scriptures is the foundation for the rest of the Old Testament, namely the Pentateuch, is divided into JEPD, and none of it any longer serves as foundational. What happens in Wellhausen’s scheme is that Moses becomes the end of development of the Old Testament revelation. Moses stands at the end of the Old Testament revelation rather than at the beginning. And because Wellhausen has removed the foundation of Old Testament religion, namely the Pentateuch, from being Mosaic and then taking the material from it to construct a new building, you might say, of his own design, he is then left to contrive a foundation according to his own opinion.

#### f. Foundation of OT Religion Built on Canaanite Paganism

What is the foundation, you might ask, of Old Testament religion if not Moses? Well, he’s very ready to give up that foundation. What he says is Israel’s religion in the

ancient time is no different than Canaanite religion. In the early days Yahweh was a god like all the other gods; he just had a different name. So you see here is a crucial point of difference: the starting point of the entire development is not the Mosaic revelation; it's early Semitic heathenism, or Canaanite paganism.

Here is the difference in structure. As we view the Bible, we would say that revelation runs from Moses to Christ; that's the progression from Moses to Christ. That is replaced in Wellhausen's scheme by an evolution from Canaanite heathendom to Moses. Moses is the end of development for Wellhausen. We evolve from pagan heathenism to "Mosaic" monotheism. So what for us is the beginning point of the Old Testament is for Wellhausen the end point. We see the Old Testament as moving from the law to the prophets. He saying the law, specifically D and P, come out of the prophets. They are put first. The prophets are the great creators of ethical monotheism. He moves from heathenism to the prophets and finally to "Moses" [JEDP].

#### g. Wellhausen's Problem with the Prophets

In the process, the prophets are left hanging in thin air because in his view they are not reformers who stand on the foundation of Moses. The biblical view is that the prophets are basically reformers who stood on the foundation of Moses to call people back to their covenant obligation. To the contrary for Wellhausen: They are not reformers; they do not call people back to the old ways; they invent completely new ones. So in Wellhausen's view the prophets are then the ones who lead the people through ethical preaching away from early heathenism and bring them to "Mosaic" monotheism. So that's the scheme of things. That's why this whole thing of the law and the prophets, and order and connections between the law and the prophets, is of such significance. It's either Wellhausen's way or the biblical way.

#### h. Student Questions

Well that's all under A: "The Place of Centralization of Worship and Wellhausen's Reconstruction of Israel's Religious Development." You see the key role

that plays.

Question from student.

Wellhausen would say these documents were formulated and placed in the mouth of Moses. In other words, it's that pious fraud idea. But it's written as if Moses said it but he didn't actually say it.

Question from student.

I think Wellhausen was caught up in philosophic questions both with respect to rationalistic presuppositions and with respect to this evolutionary concept of religion, which was in his time a great new idea of evolutionary development. In that kind of framework of thinking I think then he was led one step at a time and he was led to the conclusion that orthodoxy could not be defended. Yet for him, this kind of approach was "scientific." If you are going to keep your integrity, you have to go wherever it leads you. That's where it led him. To his credit, as I mentioned earlier in this course, he resigned his position from the faculty of the theological seminary because, in good conscience, he realized he could no longer train students for the evangelical ministry. So he resigned his position as a matter of conscience and took another position as a teacher of Semitic languages at another university.

The problem is that many other people, particularly his students and those who shared his ideas, didn't share his good conscience and took positions in theological seminaries and promoted these ideas in the theological realm in major schools in Europe and in America. But he got out of trying to train ministers because he realized what he was saying destroyed the message of the Old Testament. He couldn't train people for ministry with his approach to analysis.

Question by student.

I don't know whether the Elephantine material had come to light yet. I don't think he ever dealt with it.

Question from student.

He wasn't really interested in didactic matters too much. He tried to recreate, according to his scheme, the history of the development of religion in Israel. So the

perspective he is coming from is a history-of-religions perspective. How did Israel's religious ideas develop? What we know about Moses is very little since, according to Wellhausen what's in the Scripture is historically unreliable. Moses certainly didn't lead Israel en mass out of Egypt.

The prophets come before "Moses"; or better from his perspective, the prophets come before the material in the Pentateuch. The JEDP Pentateuch was not written by Moses but by lay people. But it depends on the prophets, not vice versa

I would say his premise is the evolutionary development of religion. According to him, all religions develop in that same kind of a pattern. Therefore, Israel's must have developed in that kind of pattern. Therefore, you can't have these sophisticated concepts and highly developed ritual systems that early. So his premise really is that evolutionary development is part of the system. Then he finds a way to rearrange the history in the Old Testament to fit that kind of a scheme of things.

He feels that monotheism didn't develop until the time of the prophets. It was Amos and Isaiah that developed the idea of ethical monotheism where the emphasis was on ethics and accountability to one god. And so as that begins to develop, you turn your back on these many deities and on Canaanite heathenism. It was out of this polytheistic heathenism that Israel developed. That at the same time is a factor that points towards one central place of worship because it is much more appropriate if you have one god that you have one place of worship. You have to think in totally different categories than the biblical categories we are used to.

Well, I see my time's up. Next week we'll look at B, "The Response to Wellhausen's View." Look over Deuteronomy chapter 12 because that is where we'll spend a lot of time next week.

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