

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 13, Wellhausen's Centralization of Worship Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 13, Wellhausen's Centralization of Worship, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt examines Julius Wellhausen's influential 1878 theory on the development of Israelite religion, focusing on the centralization of worship. Wellhausen posited three phases: initial multiplicity of altars, a Josiah-era attempted centralization (reflecting Deuteronomy 12), and a post-exilic successful centralization. He connected these phases to different legal codes (JE, D, and P), arguing that the Pentateuch's authorship and dating were later than traditionally believed. This challenged the traditional view of Mosaic authorship and placed the origins of Israelite religion in Canaanite paganism, with ethical monotheism emerging later through the prophets. The lecture concludes by highlighting the significant disagreement between Wellhausen's historical reconstruction and the traditional biblical narrative.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 13 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Deuteronomy).



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3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 13, Wellhausen's Centralization of Worship

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpt by Robert Vannoy on Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israel's religious development:

Briefing Document: Vannoy on Wellhausen's Reconstruction of Israel's Religious Development

I. Introduction

This document summarizes the lecture given by Robert Vannoy on the topic of Wellhausen's theory regarding the centralization of worship in ancient Israel, and its significance for modern Old Testament studies. Vannoy emphasizes that Wellhausen's work, specifically his *Prolegomena of the History of Israel* (1878), was a major turning point in Old Testament studies and remains influential, despite criticisms and changes in methodologies over the past century. Vannoy highlights that a seemingly innocuous phrase in Deuteronomy 12, "the place which the Lord your God shall choose," forms the cornerstone of Wellhausen's entire system.

II. Core Theme: Centralization of Worship

- **Key to Wellhausen's System:** The concept of a centralized place of worship is not just a minor detail; it's the linchpin of Wellhausen's entire reconstruction of Israelite religious history. As Vannoy states, "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."
- **Deuteronomy 12:** Both Wellhausen and many evangelical interpreters agree that Deuteronomy 12 mandates the centralization of worship at one central sanctuary, likely the temple in Jerusalem. This interpretation dictates that sacrifices offered outside this designated location are illegitimate.
- **The Point of Divergence:** The major point of disagreement between Wellhausen and traditional, Bible-believing scholars revolves around the authorship and dating of Deuteronomy 12. While traditionalists believe Moses wrote it, Wellhausen posits that it was written around the time of King Josiah's reforms in 621 B.C. Vannoy notes, "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?"

III. Wellhausen's Three-Phase Development of Worship

Vannoy outlines Wellhausen's hypothesis that Israel's understanding and practice of worship evolved through three distinct phases:

1. **Multiplicity of Altars:** In the earliest phase, exemplified by the time of the Judges and Samuel, worship was decentralized with altars located in numerous places. Wellhausen argued that these sites were often associated with etiological legends explaining divine appearances. He states, "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."
2. **Emergence of Jerusalem Temple:** A shift began to take place with the early prophets, such as Amos and Hosea, who criticized the unbridled cult practices. Vannoy notes, "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." The prophets and Jerusalem priests collaborated to shift worship to Jerusalem after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (722 BC). They attempted, during the time of Josiah (621 BC) to centralize all worship, but this initial attempt failed due to the people's attachment to local shrines.
3. **Centralization in Jerusalem:** It was during and after the Babylonian Exile (post-586 BC) that the people were uprooted and a new generation was more accepting of the idea of centralizing worship in Jerusalem, since they had been unable to sacrifice in Babylon. Vannoy notes that there was 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."

IV. Wellhausen's Three Phases of Legal Codes

According to Wellhausen, these phases of Israel's religious development are mirrored in the legal codes of the Old Testament:

1. **JE Code (Exodus 20:24-26):** Reflects the early phase with its allowance for multiple altars. The text states, "An altar of earth you shall make me and shall sacrifice thereon your burnt offerings... and in all places where I record my name, I will come unto you and I will bless you."
2. **D Code (Deuteronomy 12):** Corresponds to the second phase, mandating the destruction of pagan altars and requiring worship in the single, divinely chosen place. Verse 5 states, "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."

3. **P Code:** Reflects the post-exilic situation where centralization is the accepted norm. According to Vannoy, "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."

V. Wellhausen's Source Criticism

Wellhausen's theory is closely linked to source criticism. Vannoy explains, "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."

Wellhausen rearranged the previously identified documentary sources of the Pentateuch (J, E, D, P). He placed the P source, which is found in much of Exodus and almost all of Leviticus, as the latest source, after the exile, and after the D source, which he dated to the time of Josiah's reforms (621 B.C.).

VI. Problems with Wellhausen's Approach

Vannoy identifies several key problems with Wellhausen's reconstruction:

- **No Tabernacle:** Wellhausen's scheme denies the existence of a pre-temple tabernacle, calling all material about it a "retrojection" from the "P" source, who projected the temple model back into earlier times. Vannoy states, "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." This directly contradicts the Biblical account.
- **Dating and Authorship:** By moving the Mosaic material to a later date, Wellhausen undermines the traditional view that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) forms the foundation for the rest of the Old Testament. Vannoy states, "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."
- **Foundation of OT Religion:** Wellhausen posits that Israelite religion evolved from Canaanite paganism, not from Mosaic revelation. This position reverses the traditional biblical narrative. Vannoy notes, "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."

- **Role of the Prophets:** Wellhausen's model reduces the prophets to innovators of ethical monotheism, rather than reformers who call the people back to the covenant. Vannoy states, "They are not reformers; they do not call people back to the old ways; they invent completely new ones."

VII. Wellhausen's Motivations and Impact

- **Rationalistic and Evolutionary Presuppositions:** Wellhausen was influenced by the prevailing intellectual climate of his time, including rationalism and evolutionary theory. As Vannoy notes, Wellhausen was "caught up in philosophic questions both with respect to rationalistic presuppositions and with respect to this evolutionary concept of religion."
- **Conscientious Resignation:** Despite his revolutionary theory, Wellhausen was conscientious enough to resign his position at a theological seminary because he could not, in good conscience, train students for ministry while holding the views that he had.
- **Widespread Influence:** Despite his resignation, his ideas were widely adopted by his students and others. His views had a great impact on theological education in Europe and the US.

VIII. Conclusion

Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israel's religious history fundamentally challenges the traditional understanding of the Old Testament. His theory, centered on the centralization of worship and based on evolutionary premises, has had a major impact on modern Old Testament studies. While he did try to act with integrity, his revolutionary theory ultimately placed Moses at the *end* of the development of the Old Testament revelation, rather than at the beginning.

This lecture by Vannoy underscores the critical nature of Deuteronomy 12 and the debate surrounding its dating and interpretation, a debate which has significant ramifications for understanding the entire Old Testament.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 13, Wellhausen's Centralization of Worship

Deuteronomy and the Centralization of Worship: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. What is the significance of the phrase "the place which the Lord your God shall choose" in Deuteronomy 12, according to the lecture?
2. This phrase is central to the debate over the centralization of worship in ancient Israel and serves as a key point in Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israel's religious history. It's argued that this phrase requires worship at one central location, which, in turn, becomes the basis for Wellhausen's source-critical analysis of the Pentateuch.
3. How does Wellhausen interpret Deuteronomy 12 regarding the location of sacrifices?
4. Wellhausen understands Deuteronomy 12 to mandate that all sacrifices be brought to a single, central sanctuary, specifically the temple in Jerusalem. He argues that any altar or sacrifice outside of this chosen location is illegitimate.
5. What is the primary difference between Wellhausen's view of Deuteronomy 12 and that of evangelical interpreters?
6. Both Wellhausen and many evangelical interpreters agree on what Deuteronomy 12 says: that all sacrifices are to be brought to one central location. However, they disagree on the timing of the text's origin; Wellhausen attributes the text to the time of Josiah (621 B.C.), whereas evangelicals attribute it to Moses.
7. What is source criticism, and how did Wellhausen use it in his reconstruction of Israel's history?
8. Source criticism is a method of analyzing biblical texts to identify their original sources. Wellhausen employed source criticism to divide the Pentateuch into four main sources (J, E, D, and P) and sequenced these sources chronologically, placing the P source last which heavily influenced his view of Israel's history.
9. What are the three phases of the place of worship that Wellhausen identifies in the Old Testament?

10. Wellhausen's three phases are: (1) a time of multiple altars not linked to a specific location, (2) an initial movement toward centralization influenced by prophets and political factors, and (3) successful centralization in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile.
11. How did early prophets like Amos and Hosea influence the shift from multiple altars to centralized worship, according to Wellhausen?
12. According to Wellhausen, the prophets criticized the unbridled cultic practices associated with multiple altars, emphasizing ethics over ritual. Their influence, along with the rise of Jerusalem, led to the idea of a more centralized place of worship.
13. According to the lecture, what is the significance of Josiah's reforms in 621 B.C. to Wellhausen's theory?

Wellhausen viewed Josiah's reforms in 621 B.C., particularly the finding of the "book of the law" (understood as Deuteronomy), as the historical moment when centralization of worship was first introduced and enforced. This event serves as a key date from which he develops his chronology of the Pentateuchal sources.

1. What does Wellhausen mean when he refers to the "P" document?
2. The "P" document is one of the four sources that Wellhausen identifies in the Pentateuch, which he claims was written after the Babylonian exile. Wellhausen believes that the "P" source is a later text that simply assumes centralized worship as the norm, unlike earlier documents, and is thus later in the sequence.
3. According to Wellhausen, what is the origin of Israel's religion?
4. Wellhausen posits that Israel's religion originated from Canaanite paganism, not from a unique revelation from God to Moses. In his view, Yahweh was initially one god among many, and the development of ethical monotheism occurred later through the influence of the prophets.
5. How does Wellhausen's theory affect the traditional understanding of Moses' role in the development of Israel's religion?
6. Wellhausen's theory relegates Moses to the end of the development of Israel's religion, rather than the beginning. According to Wellhausen, the foundational documents that have been traditionally ascribed to Moses actually come at the end of the process, with the law actually a product of the prophets.

Answer Key

1. This phrase is central to the debate over the centralization of worship in ancient Israel and serves as a key point in Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israel's religious history. It's argued that this phrase requires worship at one central location, which, in turn, becomes the basis for Wellhausen's source-critical analysis of the Pentateuch.
2. Wellhausen understands Deuteronomy 12 to mandate that all sacrifices be brought to a single, central sanctuary, specifically the temple in Jerusalem. He argues that any altar or sacrifice outside of this chosen location is illegitimate.
3. Both Wellhausen and many evangelical interpreters agree on what Deuteronomy 12 says: that all sacrifices are to be brought to one central location. However, they disagree on the timing of the text's origin; Wellhausen attributes the text to the time of Josiah (621 B.C.), whereas evangelicals attribute it to Moses.
4. Source criticism is a method of analyzing biblical texts to identify their original sources. Wellhausen employed source criticism to divide the Pentateuch into four main sources (J, E, D, and P) and sequenced these sources chronologically, placing the P source last which heavily influenced his view of Israel's history.
5. Wellhausen's three phases are: (1) a time of multiple altars not linked to a specific location, (2) an initial movement toward centralization influenced by prophets and political factors, and (3) successful centralization in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile.
6. According to Wellhausen, the prophets criticized the unbridled cultic practices associated with multiple altars, emphasizing ethics over ritual. Their influence, along with the rise of Jerusalem, led to the idea of a more centralized place of worship.
7. Wellhausen viewed Josiah's reforms in 621 B.C., particularly the finding of the "book of the law" (understood as Deuteronomy), as the historical moment when centralization of worship was first introduced and enforced. This event serves as a key date from which he develops his chronology of the Pentateuchal sources.
8. The "P" document is one of the four sources that Wellhausen identifies in the Pentateuch, which he claims was written after the Babylonian exile. Wellhausen believes that the "P" source is a later text that simply assumes centralized worship as the norm, unlike earlier documents, and is thus later in the sequence.

9. Wellhausen posits that Israel's religion originated from Canaanite paganism, not from a unique revelation from God to Moses. In his view, Yahweh was initially one god among many, and the development of ethical monotheism occurred later through the influence of the prophets.
10. Wellhausen's theory relegates Moses to the end of the development of Israel's religion, rather than the beginning. According to Wellhausen, the foundational documents that have been traditionally ascribed to Moses actually come at the end of the process, with the law actually a product of the prophets.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the role of Deuteronomy 12 in Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israel's religious history. How does he interpret this chapter and why does it serve as a cornerstone of his theory?
2. Analyze Wellhausen's three-phase theory of the development of the place of worship in ancient Israel. How does he use the historical narratives of the Old Testament and source criticism to support his views?
3. Explain how Wellhausen's view of the role of the prophets differs from the traditional understanding. In Wellhausen's schema, how do the prophets function and what is their contribution to Israel's religious development?
4. Critically evaluate the impact of Wellhausen's theory on the traditional understanding of the Pentateuch. How does his dating and sequencing of the J, E, D, and P documents challenge the traditional view of Mosaic authorship?
5. Explore the philosophical presuppositions underlying Wellhausen's work and how they influenced his interpretation of the Old Testament. How do rationalistic and evolutionary perspectives shape his methodology and conclusions?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Centralization of Worship:** The concept that all legitimate worship of Yahweh should take place in one designated location (primarily, the temple in Jerusalem) and not at multiple local altars.
- **Deuteronomy 12:** A key chapter in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy that, according to Wellhausen, mandates the centralization of worship in a single place.

- **Source Criticism:** A method of biblical analysis that seeks to identify and distinguish the literary sources that make up a biblical text.
- **JEDP:** The four main documentary sources that Wellhausen identified in the Pentateuch. J and E are thought to be the earliest, followed by D, and then P.
- **"J" Source:** According to Wellhausen, the earliest source in the Pentateuch, characterized by the use of the name Yahweh (or Jehovah) for God.
- **"E" Source:** A source in the Pentateuch, thought to be similar in age to the J source.
- **"D" Source:** The Deuteronomistic source, which is related to the book of Deuteronomy and is viewed as central to Wellhausen's reconstruction of history.
- **"P" Source:** According to Wellhausen, the latest source in the Pentateuch, focused on priestly matters and cultic law.
- **Wellhausen:** A German biblical scholar whose work, particularly "Prolegomena to the History of Israel," revolutionized Old Testament studies through his source-critical methodology and historical reconstruction.
- **Josiah:** The king of Judah who, in 621 B.C., enacted sweeping religious reforms, which Wellhausen sees as crucial for his timeline.
- **Etiological Legend:** A story created to explain the origin or cause of a name, ritual, or other phenomenon.
- **Ethical Monotheism:** The belief in one God characterized by moral and ethical behavior and adherence to religious laws.
- **Tabernacle:** The portable sanctuary or tent of meeting that housed the Ark of the Covenant during the wilderness wanderings of Israel, seen by Wellhausen as a later retrojection.
- **High Places:** Local sanctuaries and altars outside of the main central place of worship, which Wellhausen argued were common in earlier phases of Israel's religion.
- **Babylonian Exile:** The period in Jewish history when the people of Judah were deported to Babylon (586-539 B.C.), an event that Wellhausen argues played a critical role in the centralization of worship in Jerusalem.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 13, Wellhausen's Centralization of Worship, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Wellhausen's Theory and Deuteronomy

1. **What is the central issue in modern Old Testament studies according to the lecture, and how does it relate to Deuteronomy 12?** The lecture posits that the phrase "the place which the Lord your God shall choose" found in Deuteronomy 12 is central. This seemingly innocent phrase regarding the legitimate place of worship becomes a key factor in understanding Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israel's religious development, which has heavily influenced modern Old Testament studies. The interpretation of this phrase is a focal point for debates about the authorship and dating of the Pentateuch.
2. **What is Wellhausen's view on the centralization of worship in ancient Israel?** Wellhausen argued that the idea of centralized worship in one sanctuary (specifically, the temple in Jerusalem) was not an original Mosaic law, but rather a development that occurred much later, specifically during the time of King Josiah around 621 BC. He saw Deuteronomy 12 as a document from this period enforcing a previously non-existent practice. According to Wellhausen, before this time, Israelite worship was decentralized with multiple altars and high places and eventually evolved to the point of centralizing in the temple.
3. **What are Wellhausen's three phases of the place of worship in Israel's history, and how does he relate them to the legal codes?** Wellhausen identified three phases: 1) A period of multiple altars and decentralized worship (corresponding to the J and E sources) where altars could be constructed almost anywhere, 2) a period where Jerusalem's temple became the dominant place of worship (corresponding to the D source and the reforms of Josiah), and 3) a post-exilic phase where centralized worship in Jerusalem became the norm (corresponding to the P source). He sees these three phases mirrored in the legal codes of the Pentateuch, with different laws reflecting different stages of development, specifically relating to the centralization of worship.

4. **How does Wellhausen's theory impact the traditional understanding of the authorship and dating of the Pentateuch?** Wellhausen's theory dismantles the traditional understanding that Moses authored the entire Pentateuch. He divides the Pentateuch into four main sources (J, E, D, and P) and argues that they were written and combined over a long period, with the "P" source written after the exile, much later than Moses. This means that much of what the Bible traditionally ascribes to Moses was in fact written by people long after Moses. He places the writing of the Deuteronomy during the reign of Josiah in 621 B.C. based on the religious reforms of the time.
5. **How does Wellhausen's view of the prophets differ from the traditional understanding?** Traditionally, prophets are viewed as reformers who call people back to their covenant obligations established by Moses. Wellhausen views the prophets as not standing on the foundation of Moses. Rather, he sees them as the innovators of ethical monotheism who moved the religion away from early polytheism. He believes the legal codes and the ideas in the Pentateuch came *after* the time of the prophets, not before. He argues that the prophets were the ones who initially moved away from pagan practices, which later influenced the creation of the Pentateuch legal codes.
6. **What role does the "P" document play in Wellhausen's system, and why does he place it late?** The "P" document, which includes much of Leviticus and parts of Exodus, is considered by Wellhausen to be the latest source. He places it after the exile because it assumes a centralized system of worship that had already been established. For him, "P" reflects a period where centralization was taken for granted, unlike "D" (Deuteronomy) which is advocating for it. He uses it to show an evolution of thought as a final stage of development for the religious practices in Israel.

7. **According to Wellhausen, what was the origin of Israel's religion if not the Mosaic revelation, and why is this significant?** Wellhausen argues that the origins of Israelite religion were not divinely inspired through Moses, but developed out of Canaanite paganism. This means that Yahweh, in the early days of Israel, was simply another god among many other gods. Over time, through the prophets, this developed into an ethical monotheism. This view is significant because it completely changes the foundation of Old Testament religion, which traditionally is rooted in the Mosaic covenant. He sees the development as an evolutionary progress from paganism to the ethics of the prophets, culminating in the monotheism presented in the Pentateuch, which in his view is a later creation.
8. **What are some of the major implications of Wellhausen's theory for the study of the Old Testament and the Bible's authority?** Wellhausen's theory challenges the traditional understanding of the authority of the Pentateuch as divinely revealed and written by Moses. It undermines the view of Moses as a founder figure and it essentially places Moses as the end of Old Testament development rather than the beginning. By dating much of the Pentateuch late and placing the prophets as the source of the law, Wellhausen's view transforms the order and origin of Old Testament religion and challenges the historical reliability of biblical texts by viewing them as later constructions based on the social and political climate of those who wrote them. This shifts the focus away from divine revelation towards socio-historical influences on religious development.