

# Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 1, Wellhausen [Source Criticism], Gunkel [Form Criticism] Resources from NotebookLM

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

## 1. Abstract of Vannoy, Genesis, Session 1, Wellhausen [Source Criticism], Gunkel [Form Criticism], Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt examines the historical-critical approaches of Julius Wellhausen and Hermann Gunkel to Old Testament literature. **Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis** posits that the Pentateuch is a composite of four sources (JEDP) written over centuries, impacting the historicity of the text. **Gunkel's Form Criticism**, building upon Wellhausen's work, **analyzes oral traditions** behind the written sources, categorizing narratives by genre (Gattung) and their life-settings (Sitz im Leben). Gunkel's approach emphasizes the **religious message** over strict historical accuracy, viewing narratives like those in Genesis as legends rather than factual accounts. The lecture notes the lasting influence of these critical methods, particularly their impact on liberal theological thought in the United States.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Genesis, Session 1 – 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 → Genesis).**



**Vannoy\_Genesis\_Session01.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 1, Wellhausen [Source Criticism], Gunkel [Form Criticism]

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript:

#### Briefing Document: Analysis of Old Testament Historical Criticism

##### I. Introduction

This document provides an analysis of the key concepts discussed in the first lecture of a course on Old Testament History, focusing on the critical methods of Julius Wellhausen and Hermann Gunkel. The lecture aims to demonstrate how these scholars' theories have significantly impacted the interpretation of the Old Testament, particularly regarding its historical accuracy and religious development. The lecture also stresses the importance of understanding these methods even if they are ultimately rejected as a means of doing responsible Old Testament study.

##### II. Julius Wellhausen and the Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP)

- **Core Idea:** Wellhausen's primary contribution is the "Documentary Source Hypothesis" (JEDP), which posits that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) is not the work of a single author (Moses), but a compilation of four distinct sources, each with its own characteristics and time of composition:
- **J (Yahwist):** The oldest source, dating to approximately 850 B.C., favors the divine name Jehovah.
- **E (Elohist):** Composed around 750 B.C., uses the divine name Elohim.
- **D (Deuteronomist):** Written around 621 B.C., associated with the reforms of King Josiah and the discovery of the "book of the law."
- **P (Priestly):** The latest source, circa 450 B.C., focuses on priestly matters, rituals, and genealogies.
- **Timeline & Development:** Wellhausen argued that these sources were developed over a long period and then combined by redactors. This method suggests that concepts and ideas attributed to early times (like the Patriarchs) are actually from later periods, specifically the time of the Babylonian exile (586 BC).

- **Quote:** "So along that kind of a time line, according to Wellhausen, the material that makes up the Pentateuch was developed over a long period of time, starting with J, then followed by E, then D, and finally P with a series of redactors who combined the materials."
- **Evolution of Religion:** Wellhausen also proposed a religious evolutionary model:
- **Polytheism:** Worship of many gods.
- **Henotheism:** Belief that one's own god is superior to others.
- **Monotheism:** Belief in one God.
- Wellhausen also discerned an evolutionary pattern in worship: natural religion (J and E sources), prophetic religion (D source), and priestly religion (P source).
- **Impact on Historicity:** Wellhausen's theory led to a low view of the Old Testament's historical reliability. It suggests that the text contains distortions and fabrications reflecting later religious ideas rather than an accurate historical account.
- **Quote:** "What it does is result in a very low view of the historical material of the Old Testament because it alleges there are a lot of distortions, if not outright fabrications involved in the historical material because of his theory."
- **Wellhausen's Resignation:** Despite the wide acceptance of his work, Wellhausen resigned from his theological professorship, feeling his teachings were unsuitable for preparing ministers. He is noted for his integrity in this decision.
- **Quote:** "I became a theologian because I was interested in the scientific treatment of the Bible. Yet it only slowly dawned upon me that a professor of theology has, at the same time, the task of preparing students for service in the Protestant church and that I am not adequate to perform this practical task. Since then, my theological professorship has weighed heavily on my conscience."
- **Legacy:** Wellhausen's ideas, though challenged, continue to influence biblical studies, particularly in liberal theological settings. However, his emphasis on the history of religion rather than the message of the Old Testament is a serious problem that the speaker identifies.
- **Quote:** "But the end result is, the message of the Old Testament was lost and it was replaced with an attempt to reconstruct the history of Israel's religion on an evolutionary basis."

### III. Hermann Gunkel and Form Criticism

- **Core Idea:** Gunkel's form criticism adds another layer to the JEDP model by focusing on the oral traditions that he believed existed before the written texts. He sought to identify literary units (Gattung/Genre), their "situation in life" (Sitz im Leben), and the "history of forms" (Formgeschichte).
- **Quote:** "But the idea of form criticism is to penetrate behind the documents to the oral tradition which was thought to be crystallized in the documents."
- **Methodology: Gattung/Genre:** Identifying the literary type (e.g., poetry, narrative, prophecy).
- **Sitz im Leben:** Determining the social and cultural context that would have produced a specific genre of oral tradition.
- **Formgeschichte:** Analyzing the development of literary forms over time.
- **Gunkel and Wellhausen:** Gunkel accepted the JEDP theory, but he saw the written sources as the final result of a long process of oral tradition. This makes the material within each of the JEDP documents older than Wellhausen said.
- **Quote:** "He recognizes the antiquity of much of these JEDP documents that Wellhausen didn't."
- **Orality to Written Composition:** Gunkel proposed that oral stories were later written down as separate units and then gradually strung together, possibly with modifications and reconstructions, into the larger narratives we see today.
- **Quote:** "So there were a bunch of separate story units and gradually, this is part of his theory, you have these units strung together in some sort of sequence but that took a period of time to complete."
- **Myths and Legends:** Gunkel categorized many of the Genesis stories as myths and legends, rather than history, suggesting that the religious message was more important than historical accuracy.
- **Quote:** "Gunkel believed that the literary genius of a primitive people first expressed itself in myths about the origins of things. In myths, gods are the primary actors while in legends the exploits are about human folk heroes. In legends, men are the primary actors."

- **Quote:** "The senseless confusion of legend with lying has caused good people to hesitate to concede that there are legends in the Old Testament. But legends are not lies. On the contrary, they are a particular form of poetry."
- **Relevance of Christ and the Apostles:** Gunkel dismissed the testimony of Christ and the apostles about the historical nature of Genesis, arguing they were simply products of their time.
- **Quote:** "The men of the New Testament are not presumed to have been exceptional men in such matters, but shared the point of view of their time. Hence, we are not warranted in looking to the New Testament for the solution of questions about the literary history of the Old Testament."
- **A Priori Rejection of the Miraculous:** Gunkel's criteria for distinguishing legend from history included the assumption that miraculous events are impossible, which makes his conclusions inherently skeptical of the historicity of the Bible.
- **Quote:** "The clearest criterion of legend is that it frequently reports things that are quite incredible."
- **Quote:** "Certainly, in evaluating historical material, credibility is not to be dismissed... But when you come to biblical narrative, you certainly cannot determine whether it's legend or history, by assuming in advance, the impossibility of the miraculous and that's at the heart of Gunkel's methodology."
- **Emphasis on Religious Message:** Gunkel prioritized the religious message of the stories over their historicity, seeing them as poetic narratives that teach moral and spiritual truths, like the fables of Aesop.
- **Quote:** "The important point is and will remain the poetic tone of the narratives. History, which claims to inform us of what has actually happened, is in its very nature prose, while legend is by nature poetry. Its aim being to please, elevate, to inspire, and to move."
- **Etiological Legends:** Gunkel categorized many of the Genesis narratives as etiological legends designed to explain the origins of tribes, names, customs, rituals, and geological features. They are all viewed as fictional, constructed to make sense of the world.

- **Quote:** "As applied to the legends of Genesis, it means that the legends explain why something is as it is presently observed."
- Examples:
- **Ethnological:** Explaining tribal relationships.
- **Etymological:** Explaining the meaning of names.
- **Ceremonial:** Explaining religious rituals.
- **Geological:** Explaining the origin of natural features.

#### IV. Lower vs. Higher Criticism

- **Lower Criticism:** Concerned with the text itself, aiming to reconstruct the original text by comparing extant manuscripts and identifying any textual variations.
- **Higher Criticism:** Concerned with authorship, dating, and literary analysis. This kind of analysis can be performed in a helpful or unhelpful way.

**V. Conclusion** This lecture highlights the impact of Wellhausen and Gunkel's critical methods on our understanding of the Old Testament. While acknowledging their scholarly contributions, the lecture emphasizes that their approaches are inherently skeptical, leading to a diminished view of the Old Testament's historical reliability and potentially obscuring its theological message. The lecture underscores the importance of considering these critical viewpoints while advocating for a more balanced and faith-affirming approach to Old Testament study.

## 4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 1, Wellhausen [Source Criticism], Gunkel [Form Criticism]

### Old Testament History Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the JEDP theory, and what are the approximate dates associated with each source?
2. According to Wellhausen, how did Israel's religion evolve?
3. What impact does the JEDP theory have on the historicity of the Old Testament?
4. Why did Wellhausen resign from his position as professor of theology?
5. What is Form Criticism, and how does it relate to Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis?
6. What are Gunkel's three key terms, and what does each mean?
7. According to Gunkel, how did the oral traditions of the Old Testament eventually become written documents?
8. How does Gunkel view the narratives in Genesis?
9. What does Gunkel mean by "etiological legends," and what are the different types?
10. What is the difference between higher and lower criticism?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The JEDP theory is a hypothesis that the Pentateuch was compiled from four independent sources: J (Jehovah source, ca. 850 B.C.), E (Elohim source, ca. 750 B.C.), D (Deuteronomy source, ca. 621 B.C.), and P (Priestly source, ca. 450 B.C.). These sources were later combined by redactors.
2. Wellhausen viewed Israel's religion as developing from polytheism (many gods) to henotheism (one god is better) and finally to monotheism (one God). He also saw it evolving from a natural religion, to a prophetic religion, and finally to a priestly religion.

3. The JEDP theory results in a very low view of the historical material in the Old Testament because it suggests many distortions and fabrications in the historical accounts. It implies that concepts attributed to early times are actually reflections of later periods when the sources were written.
4. Wellhausen resigned because he felt his teachings were not adequately preparing students for service in the Protestant church. He believed his approach, focused on critical literary analysis rather than religious message, was not suitable for pastoral training.
5. Form Criticism is a methodology that seeks to understand the oral traditions behind the written documents. It accepts Wellhausen's source analysis but attempts to penetrate the text to find the original forms and contexts of the story units.
6. Gunkel's key terms are "gattung" (literary type or genre), "sitz im leben" (situation in life), and "formgeschichte" (history of forms). These terms help to classify and trace the development of story units from oral tradition to written form.
7. Gunkel believed that oral traditions existed independently before being written down. These oral stories were eventually molded, combined, and adapted over time to form the J, E, D, and P documents.
8. Gunkel views the narratives in Genesis as legends, a form of poetry not intended to convey history. He believes they aim to teach moral or religious lessons rather than describe historical events.
9. Etiological legends, according to Gunkel, are stories created to explain why something is as it is presently observed. They come in different forms, such as ethnological (explaining tribal relations), etymological (explaining the origins of names), ceremonial (explaining religious rituals), and geological (explaining the origin of a locality).
10. Lower criticism focuses on the text itself, comparing different manuscripts to establish the original wording. Higher criticism focuses on the authorship, date, and setting of the biblical texts, often using methods like the JEDP theory.



## Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis with Gunkel's Form Criticism. How do these approaches impact the interpretation of the Old Testament?
2. Explain how Gunkel's assumptions about the nature of legend and myth affect his conclusions about the historical reliability of the Old Testament.
3. Discuss the significance of the terms *gattung*, *sitz im leben*, and *formgeschichte* in Gunkel's methodology. How do they contribute to his understanding of the development of biblical literature?
4. Analyze the ways in which both Wellhausen and Gunkel view the Old Testament in terms of an evolutionary understanding of religion. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this perspective?
5. Critically evaluate the impact of Wellhausen's and Gunkel's ideas on modern biblical studies and theology. How have these ideas been received, and what are some of the ongoing debates surrounding their theories?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Documentary Hypothesis:** The theory that the Pentateuch was compiled from four main independent sources (J, E, D, and P) that were combined by later editors or redactors.
- **Form Criticism:** A method of analyzing biblical texts that focuses on identifying literary genres (*Gattung*) and the original life settings (*Sitz im Leben*) that produced them. It attempts to trace the development of these genres over time (*Formgeschichte*).
- **Gattung:** A German term for "literary type" or genre; it refers to the specific kind of literature a given text or story unit represents (e.g., poetry, narrative, law, prophecy).
- **Sitz im Leben:** A German phrase meaning "situation in life." In form criticism, this refers to the historical and social setting in which a particular literary genre developed and was used.

- **Formgeschichte:** A German term meaning "history of forms," refers to the study of how a literary type developed over time, from its oral origins to its final written form.
- **J Source:** One of the four sources identified in the Documentary Hypothesis. It is characterized by its use of the divine name Jehovah (Yahweh) and is dated to around 850 B.C.
- **E Source:** Another source identified in the Documentary Hypothesis; characterized by its use of the divine name Elohim and is dated to around 750 B.C.
- **D Source:** The source associated with the Book of Deuteronomy and is dated around 621 B.C.
- **P Source:** The Priestly source, identified in the Documentary Hypothesis, often associated with legal and ritual material, and is dated to around 450 B.C.
- **Redactor:** An editor who combined and revised different source materials, such as J, E, D, and P, to create the Pentateuch.
- **Polytheism:** The belief in or worship of multiple gods.
- **Henotheism:** The belief in or worship of one god while acknowledging the existence of other gods.
- **Monotheism:** The belief in or worship of only one God.
- **Higher Criticism:** A branch of biblical criticism that focuses on questions of authorship, date, and sources of biblical texts.
- **Lower Criticism:** Also called textual criticism, which focuses on establishing the most accurate text of biblical manuscripts by comparing variants from different texts.
- **Etiological Legend:** A type of legend that explains the origin of a custom, name, or natural phenomenon.

## 5. FAQs on Vannoy, Genesis, Session 1, Wellhausen [Source Criticism], Gunkel [Form Criticism], Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

**What is Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP) and what does it propose about the composition of the Pentateuch?**

- Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP) is a theory suggesting that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) was not written by Moses as traditionally believed, but was compiled from four distinct, independent sources, labeled J, E, D, and P, written at different times: J (Jehovah, using the divine name Yahweh) is considered the earliest source (ca. 850 B.C.), followed by E (Elohim) (ca. 750 B.C.), then D (Deuteronomy) (ca. 621 B.C.), and finally P (Priestly source) (ca. 450 B.C.). According to Wellhausen, these sources were combined and edited over time, resulting in the final form of the Pentateuch, which he considered to be a mosaic of materials.
- **According to Wellhausen, how did religious concepts in the Old Testament develop over time?**
- Wellhausen proposed an evolutionary model for the development of religion in ancient Israel, progressing from polytheism (belief in many gods) to henotheism (belief in one god among many, with a primary focus on their own deity) and finally to monotheism (belief in only one God). He also outlined a parallel development in religious practice from "natural religion" (primitive worship in J and E), to "prophetic religion" (ethical awareness in D), and then to "priestly religion" (external ceremonial rites in P). These stages are meant to correspond with the dating of the JEDP sources.
- **What are some implications of the Documentary Hypothesis for the historicity of the Old Testament?**
- Wellhausen's theory has significant implications for the historicity of the Old Testament, because it claims that many concepts and ideas attributed to earlier times, such as circumcision, covenant, and election, are not genuine and actually reflect later, post-exilic (after the Babylonian exile) ideas inserted into the text by the Priestly source (P). In this framework, the Old Testament historical narrative is thought to have been significantly distorted by the insertion of later ideas, making a reconstruction of earlier history more difficult.

- **Why did Wellhausen resign from his professorship despite the widespread acceptance of his theories?**
- Wellhausen, despite the popularity of his ideas, resigned from his professorship in theology because he felt that his approach to the Bible (focusing on historical criticism and the development of religion) was incompatible with the pastoral duties of preparing students for the ministry. He felt that his theories did not adequately prepare students for service in the Protestant church and his work undermined the faith of those he was meant to serve.
- **What is form criticism and how does it relate to the Documentary Hypothesis?**
- Form criticism, pioneered by Hermann Gunkel, is a method of biblical analysis that attempts to identify and categorize individual literary units (stories, poems, laws, etc.) within the biblical text by their *Gattung* (genre or literary type). It seeks to identify the *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life) in which each unit would have originated and been used orally before being written down. Form criticism accepts the Documentary Hypothesis, but builds upon it by exploring the oral traditions that shaped and existed prior to the writing of the JEDP documents.
- **How does Gunkel's approach to the Old Testament differ from Wellhausen's?**
- While both scholars are critical of the traditional view of Old Testament authorship and historicity, Gunkel focuses on the pre-literary oral traditions of individual stories. Unlike Wellhausen, who saw JEDP sources as directly created by their writers, Gunkel believed these sources were the written culmination of long periods of oral transmission and development. Gunkel's theory suggests that the individual stories of the bible are much older than Wellhausen had proposed.
- **What are the key elements of Gunkel's methodology (*Gattung*, *Sitz im Leben*, *Formgeschichte*)?**
- Gunkel introduced the concepts of *Gattung* (literary type or genre), *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life), and *Formgeschichte* (history of forms) into biblical studies. His methodology involves identifying the literary type of a given biblical unit, then theorizing what social or cultural context would produce that specific type of story or text. *Formgeschichte* is the tracing of how a literary unit evolved over time from its original context into its final written form.

- **According to Gunkel, what is the nature of the narratives in Genesis, and what are some examples of his interpretations of them?**
- Gunkel considered the narratives of Genesis to be legends rather than historical accounts. He believed these legends, particularly the early chapters, served etiological purposes, explaining the origins of various aspects of life (like the relationship of tribes (ethnological legends), names (etymological legends), religious customs (ceremonial legends), and geographic features (geological legends)). For example, Gunkel interpreted the story of the Tower of Babel as an etiological legend that explains the diversity of languages, or the stories in Genesis about tribal relations as an attempt to justify or explain existing social realities. He valued these narratives for their poetic and religious message rather than their historical accuracy and dismissed as "barbaric" those who took them as historical prose. He also considered stories that contained supernatural or miraculous elements to not be history.