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Author(s): Bill T. Arnold and David B. Weisberg

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A CENTENNIAL REVIEW OF FRIEDRICH DELITZSCH'S "BABEL UND BIBEL" LECTURES

BILL T. ARNOLD

Bill_Arnold@asburyseminary.edu
Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY 40390

DAVID B. WEISBERG

DWeisberg@huc.edu
Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH 45220

Scholars interested in Hebrew Scriptures and comparative Near Eastern literature recently reached a significant milestone. January 13, 2002, marked the centennial of Friedrich Delitzsch's initial public lecture entitled "Babel und Bibel," which he delivered in the Singakademie of Berlin before the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft with Kaiser Wilhelm II in attendance.¹ Delitzsch delivered a second lecture on the same topic one year later (January 12, 1903), again before the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft and a distinguished audience that included both the emperor and the empress.² The second lecture was so controversial and created such an international uproar that Delitzsch's third and

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¹ At the emperor's request, Delitzsch repeated the lecture on February 1 in the Royal Palace at Berlin. See Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel: Ein Vortrag* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902), 52; Herbert B. Huffmon, "Babel und Bibel: The Encounter between Babylon and the Bible," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 22 (1983): 309; Reinhard G. Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch und der Babel-Bibel-Streit* (OBO 113; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 80.

² Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 173.

final lecture in the series was delivered in much less prestigious circumstances. On October 27 and 28, 1904, he delivered the third lecture before the literary societies of Barmen and Köln respectively. Rather than repeat the lecture at the royal palace in Berlin, Delitzsch gave a final presentation before the Verein für Geographie und Statistik in Frankfurt am Main.³

Friedrich Delitzsch was a leading Semitist of his day, and it is no exaggeration to say that he was responsible for putting Assyriology on sound philological footing. Because of his many students and monumental publications, he has been called one of the founders of modern Assyriology.⁴ The last half of the nineteenth century had witnessed an explosion of knowledge and information from Mesopotamia, and many uncritical comparisons had been made with the more familiar biblical materials. In the lectures that are the focus of our attention, Delitzsch attempted to put the fledgling discipline of Assyriology on an equal footing with biblical studies and to champion Babylonian religion and culture over against that of the Hebrew Bible. The high esteem in which Delitzsch was held and the distinguished circumstances of these lectures were nearly unprecedented. This constituted more than a watershed in the history of Assyriology and biblical studies. His theme and conclusions also had significant political and sociological ramifications involving the kaiser and the leading intellectuals of Europe at the turn of the century, so that Delitzsch's views struck a chord with the deep-seated psychological interests rooted in German cultural and political life.

Our concern in this essay is not with the role of Delitzsch's work in the history of the disciplines of Assyriology and biblical studies per se.⁵ Instead we aim to take this centennial as an opportunity to refresh the guild's memory concerning his presuppositions and the tragic turn observable in the lectures themselves. To a lesser degree, we will make reference to his subsequent work.

I. Delitzsch as a Reflection of His Context

Delitzsch's lectures themselves are still easily available, and they have been admirably summarized elsewhere in the secondary literature.⁶ Our pur-

³ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁴ John A. Brinkman, "Delitzsch, Friedrich," *NCE* 4:739; and Abraham Arzi, "Delitzsch, Friedrich," *EncJud* 5:1475.

⁵ For which, see Mark W. Chavalas, "Assyriology and Biblical Studies: A Century and a half of Tension," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible* (ed. Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, forthcoming); and David B. Weisberg, "The Impact of Assyriology on Biblical Studies" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Region of the SBL/AOS, Chicago, Illinois, 14 February 2000).

⁶ The lectures generated an enormous amount of literature both in the popular press and in

pose here is not to repeat these summaries but to critique the lectures for their underlying assumptions. The anti-Semitism of Delitzsch's positions has often been discussed, and we hope to show how his views were stated at first subtly, and then with increasing boldness. In addition, we contend that the lectures expose other philosophical and theoretical presuppositions that are sometimes overlooked, and which illustrate further how Delitzsch mirrored his sociopolitical and cultural context. So, in addition to anti-Semitism, we encounter in Delitzsch's work unmitigated nationalism and anti-Christian sentiment.

German Nationalism

Delitzsch was a child of his time. The nationalism that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was for the first time based on a feeling of community among a people of common descent, language, and religion instead of dynastic ties in which citizens owed loyalty to church or ruling family. Whereas previous cultures had been concerned with clan, tribe, or village, now the nation-state became paramount as a means of realizing social, economic, and cultural aspirations. Such nationalism ran rampant in the Western world during the nineteenth century, during which the great powers acquired colonial empires throughout the world, creating capital for industrialization. Germany had been a relative newcomer to European colonial expansion. Since unification under Otto von Bismarck in 1871, Germany had experienced rapid industrialization and economic growth and had thrown itself full scale into the scramble among the European powers to colonize Africa and the Pacific. Whereas the British Empire had dominated the early nineteenth century, the end of the century saw a balance of European powers vying with one another for colonies, fueled by a surging political rivalry, sometimes referred to as "New Imperialism." Together with the evolutionary winds that blew throughout the nineteenth century, these events gave the intelligentsia an almost euphoric sense of progress and accomplishment.

Just before the turn of the century, however, Germany lagged behind its European rivals in ancient Near Eastern research. The Louvre in Paris and the British Museum in London had by then acquired vast quantities of archaeological artifacts and texts from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, creating in Ger-

scholarly publications. The international attention created a demand for copies of the lectures, which resulted in numerous editions, many of which incorporated revisions. For thorough treatment of the literature, including exhaustive text-critical treatment of the lectures in all their editions, see Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 80–91 (lecture 1), 174–84 (lecture 2), 250–56 (lecture 3), and his bibliographies (pp. 378–408). For summaries, see Klaus Johanning, *Der Bibel-Babel-Streit: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Studie* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 23/343; Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1988), 33–67; Mogens Trolle Larsen, "The 'Babel/Bible' Controversy and Its Aftermath," *CANE* 1:99–103; and Huffmon, "Babel und Bibel," 311–18.

many a sense of urgency in archaeological expeditions. Parts of the Near East were seen as potential colonies for European powers, and it became a matter of national pride for Germany to assume its rightful place among the world powers in archaeological research, as in all other endeavors. Accordingly, in 1898 the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft was founded in Berlin, with widespread support among the political elite of the country and with the principal function of raising Germany's status among the nations of Europe.⁷ Delitzsch and his teacher, Eberhard Schrader, had provided new German leadership in Semitic philology. But the fact remained that they were dependent on British and French source materials because Germany had no cuneiform collections. Consequently, at the time of Delitzsch's lectures, the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, with the support of Wilhelm II, was in the process of launching major new archaeological campaigns in Asshur, in Babylon itself, and eventually (in 1906) in Khattusha (Boghazköy).⁸

The urgent sense of nationalism that was so characteristic of the young German state at the turn of the century is characteristic also of Delitzsch's lectures. From his opening questions in lecture 1, we get a hint of the competition between nations for archaeological success.

Why all this toil and trouble in remote, inhospitable, and perilous lands? What is the purpose of going to such great expense to ransack through mounds that are many centuries old, digging all the way to the water table, all the while knowing there is no gold or silver to be found? Why this *rivalry among the nations*, in order to secure the greatest possible number of desolate tells for excavation? And, on the other hand, what is the source of the ever-growing, self-sacrificing interest, which is now apparent *on both sides of the Atlantic*, in the excavations in Assyria and Babylonia?⁹

To these questions, Delitzsch gives an answer in the next sentence: the Bible! It is the Bible that has led the nations into such rivalry and competition to secure as many desolate mounds for excavation as possible. A few paragraphs later we learn specifically which nations are most deeply involved, those that Delitzsch says are justifiably called "Bible-lands": Germany, England, and America.¹⁰

⁷ The organization's statement of purpose explained that "the time has come for Germany to take part in the great task of discovering and recovering the earliest Orient through more extensive systematic excavations" (see Larsen, "'Babel/Bible' Controversy," 96).

⁸ Huffmon, "Babel und Bibel," 309; and Larsen, "'Babel/Bible' Controversy," 96–97.

⁹ Delitzsch, *Ein Vortrag*, 3 (emphasis ours); and Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 81. All quotations of Delitzsch's work in this paper are new translations prepared by the authors.

¹⁰ "Es ist erstaunlich, wie ebenjetzt in Deutschland, England, Amerika—diesen drei Bibelländern, wie sie nicht mit Unrecht genannt worden—das Alte Testament, diese kleine Bibliothek mannigfaltigster Bücher, von einer kaum übersehbaren Zahl christlicher Gelehrter nach allen Richtungen hin durchforscht wird" (Delitzsch, *Ein Vortrag*, 4; and Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 81).

The German nationalism only hinted at in these excerpts from lecture 1 was stated blatantly in the conclusion to the printed versions of the lecture.

Babylonia and the Bible—What has been said here displays only a small excerpt of the significance of the excavations in Assyria and Babylonia for the history and progress of humanity. May it help establish the recognition that it was high time for Germany to pitch her tent on the palm-crowned banks of the streams of Paradise! Figure 50^[11] displays the residential premises for members of the expedition dispatched by the German Oriental Society, which works indefatigably there among the ruins of Babylon from morning until evening, in heat and cold, *for Germany's honor and for Germany's science*. We too "confess ourselves to be of the race that strives from darkness into light." Supported, like the archaeological undertakings of other nations, by the increasing participation of our people and the energetic support of our government, the German Oriental Society, which was the last to appear on the field—only three years ago—will also certainly maintain its glorious place under that sun, which is rising over there in the East out of those mysterious hills. The society is always inspired afresh by gratitude for the highest personal patronage and warm interest, which His Majesty our King and Emperor has been pleased to bestow to its efforts in a lasting and gracious manner.¹²

Such competition among the nations is not itself alarming, even when the archaeological enterprise of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft is described as contributing to "Germany's honor" and "Germany's science." But when this sentiment is combined in Delitzsch's subsequent work with his rejection of the authority and validity of the Hebrew Bible, this nationalism takes on a very different tone.

Delitzsch began the second lecture by rejecting the "verbal inspiration" of the Hebrew Scriptures and denying the concept of "revelation." It soon became clear that an ideological shift had occurred between the first two lectures, partially due to Delitzsch's strident reaction to critics of the first lecture. Instead of speaking of Babylon as "interpreter and illustrator" of the Hebrew Bible (as in lecture 1), Delitzsch now moved to an attack on the idea that the Hebrew Bible was authoritative for modern German Christians.¹³ In the second edition of lecture 2 published in mid-March 1903, Delitzsch included a preface in which he denigrated the ethical value of the Hebrew prophets and bemoaned the fact that the Hebrew Bible still serves believers of the West after these many centuries as an authoritative book of morality and edification. In

¹¹ The published form of the lecture was accompanied by a photograph of the dwelling of the German expedition in Babylon.

¹² Delitzsch, *Ein Vortrag*, 50–52 (emphasis ours).

¹³ Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 185–91.

the following quotation from the new preface, he implied for the first time that instead of ancient Israelite literature, it may be more beneficial for German Christians to learn to appreciate God's revelation to the German people throughout their own history.

Instead of immersing ourselves "with grateful hearts" in the rule of God among our own people, from Germany's primitive times to the present, we continue granting a "revelation" status to those old Israelite oracles, either out of ignorance, apathy, or blindness. But this no longer stands up in the light of science, nor that of religion, nor ethics.¹⁴

Delitzsch states this proposal even more boldly in his last publication, *Die Grosse Täuschung* (The Great Deception), released in two volumes in 1920 and 1921.¹⁵ Here his nationalism had come to full fruition in his suggestion that the Hebrew Bible is not a book of Christian religion and should be replaced by German Christians with Schwaner's *Germanen-Bibel*, which collects the thoughts of Germany's heroes of the past concerning God, eternity, and immortality.¹⁶ By seeking to replace what he considered repulsive features of the Hebrew Bible, Delitzsch added his voice to those in Germany who sought to eradicate all things Jewish, and thus he anticipated certain German Christians of the Third Reich. In the second lecture, Delitzsch's nationalism met his anti-Semitism and resulted in an attempt to eliminate the Hebrew Scriptures as Christian literature; such a move is also, as we shall see, anti-Christian.

Anti-Semitism

The anti-Semitism present in Delitzsch's lectures and subsequent work has been thoroughly documented and widely acknowledged.¹⁷ As with his expressions of nationalism, Delitzsch was on this point again a child of his times. In fact, among contemporaneous European scholars of the Hebrew Bible, Delitzsch stood in a long line of anti-Jewish predecessors. For a prime

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁵ Friedrich Delitzsch, *Die Grosse Täuschung*, Erster Teil, *Kritische Betrachtungen zu den alttestamentlichen Berichten über Israels Eindringen in Kanaan, die Gottesoffenbarung vom Sinai und die Wirksamkeit der Propheten* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1920); *idem*, *Die Grosse Täuschung*, Zweiter (Schluss-) Teil, *Fortgesetzte kritische Betrachtungen zum Alten Testament, vornehmlich den Prophetenschriften und Psalmen, nebst Schlußfolgerungen* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1921).

¹⁶ Delitzsch, *Die Grosse Täuschung*, 1:97. His reference is to Wilhelm Schwaner, ed., *Germanen-Bibel: Aus heiligen Schriften germanischer Völker* (3d ed., Schlachtensee: Volkerzieher Verlag, 1910).

¹⁷ Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 268–71; and Larsen, "'Babel/Bible' Controversy," 104–5. His most racist expressions were not published until after the lectures themselves, specifically in *Die Grosse Täuschung*.

example, we need look no further than the celebrated Julius Wellhausen, who like many other scholars of the period had a penchant for using language of death or dying when describing Judaism, in marked contrast with the vibrancy of earlier Israelite religion.¹⁸ One of the fundamental assumptions pervading Wellhausen's rather imposing historical construction was the conviction that the postexilic, law-centered religion of Judaism was a decline from the higher prophetic insights of the earlier period. In essence, the religion of Judaism was the religion of Israel after it had died.¹⁹ He believed that Christianity, again by contrast, emerged as a result of the struggle in the first century to recapture the old prophetic spirit, and that Jesus and the early church were reacting against the legalism of Pharisaic Judaism. In his overarching evolutionary schema, tracing religion from primitive expressions of animism and polytheism to high ethical monotheism, Judaism was actually a setback in humankind's development. Jewish scholars of the day were vocal in their opposition to such arguments, as is most notably evident in the well-known hyperbole of Solomon Schechter, when he equated higher criticism with higher anti-Semitism.²⁰

The lectures under review here evince a similar prejudice revealed in Delitzsch's concern to uncover features of the ancient Near East that were non-Semitic.²¹ In the first lecture, Delitzsch describes the wife of Ashurbanipal, whose image was preserved on a relief from Nineveh, as follows: "Ashurbanipal's wife is obviously to be thought of as a princess of Aryan blood and blond hair."²² Early in the third lecture he makes the assertion that the Hebrew author of the seventh century B.C.E. who composed Gen 10 gave Shem the rank of firstborn to the father of postdiluvian humanity. But, avers Delitzsch,

¹⁸ On the anti-Semitism of Wellhausen in general, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon* (University of Notre Dame Center for the Study of Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity 3; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 20–22; and Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 41–43. Interestingly, Lou H. Silberman relies on the oral testimony of one of Wellhausen's students, Jacob Z. Lauterbach, to argue that the *Prolegomena* was a work of anti-Judaism, while Wellhausen himself was "no vulgar anti-Semite" ("Wellhausen and Judaism," in *Julius Wellhausen and His Prolegomena to the History of Israel* [ed. D. A. Knight; Semeia 25; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983]: 75–82).

¹⁹ Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 42.

²⁰ Solomon Schechter, "Higher Criticism—Higher Anti-Semitism," in *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing, 1915), 36–37; and on Schechter's reaction to German Christian theology generally, see Norman Bentwich, "Solomon Schechter [1849–1915]," in *Great Jewish Personalities in Modern Times* (ed. Simon Noveck; The B'nai B'rith Great Books Series 2; Clinton, MA: Colonial Press, 1960), 138.

²¹ So, for example, Delitzsch customarily refers to the Medes as "der indogermanischen Meder" (*Babel und Bibel: Dritter (Schluss-) Vortrag* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1905], 49).

²² Delitzsch, *Ein Vortrag*, 19–20.

this shortsighted representation of early civilization is “constantly fettered by Semitic prejudices” and obscures the important role played by the non-Semitic peoples who preceded the later Indo-Germanic Medes.²³ This leads to an extended section on the Sumerians, whose role, in Delitzsch’s view, has been obscured by the Hebrew historians. The Sumerians are said to have established the cultural and religious conceptions for “the immigrant Semitic” Babylonians, resulting in a cultural heritage superior in its ethics and morality to that of the biblical Israelites.²⁴ That the resultant, amalgamated culture in Babylonia was superior was conveniently illustrated by the Code of Hammurapi, discovered only one year prior to Delitzsch’s first lecture. The Code revealed that Babylonian kings endeavored (like the German emperors of the Middle Ages!) to obliterate the distinction between native and foreigner, including all tribes under the dominion of the throne. By contrast, Israel’s legislated moral code requires that strangers and foreigners remain strangers and foreigners, and that they be kept aloof from Israelite national life.²⁵

Delitzsch’s racism came fully to the surface in the third lecture, where he asserted that the population of Samaria and Galilee was essentially Babylonian in origin. Once the northern kingdom of Israel fell into the Neo-Assyrian provincial system in the late eighth century B.C.E., the population of the area was a mixture that included many Babylonians. Further, Delitzsch believed that the Babylonians were not purely Semitic, but included some Aryan stock. This is where he first hints at the view that Jesus was Aryan, though his position does not yet have the insidious certainty it will later have in *Die Grosse Täuschung*.²⁶ As early as the third lecture, as part of his contention that Babylonian ethical and moral conceptions were superior to those of Israel, Delitzsch came eventually to the identification of the parable of the Good Samaritan with Babylonian ideals. He averred that the Good Samaritan (whom he called a Babylonian!) was in Jesus’ parable a model of universal neighborly love established as a pattern for all humankind to follow.²⁷ Similarly in his conclusion to the third lecture, the three wise men of the East, also said to be Babylonian, were the first to present their homage at the cradle of Christianity.²⁸

Delitzsch’s views came to full expression in his last work, the two-volume *Die Grosse Täuschung*. The title refers to the Hebrew Bible, which he wanted to expose as an untruthful historical record in order to draw conclusions about

²³ Delitzsch, *Dritter (Schluss-) Vortrag*, 3–4. He includes in this discussion a gross exaggeration for the role of the “nicht-semitischen Volke der Elamiten” (“the non-Semitic Elamites”).

²⁴ For the “eingewanderten Semiten,” see Delitzsch, *Dritter (Schluss-) Vortrag*, 32; and on the role of the Sumerians, see pp. 4–6 and 32–37.

²⁵ Delitzsch, *Dritter (Schluss-) Vortrag*, 56–57 n. 22.

²⁶ Delitzsch, *Die Grosse Täuschung*, 1:96.

²⁷ Delitzsch, *Dritter (Schluss-) Vortrag*, 23; see also pp. 56–57 n. 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

"the Jewish question."²⁹ Delitzsch's anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism are no clearer than here. He expressed concern that the history of the Jewish people posed a threat to the future of the German people.

It is obvious that such a people, which is deliberately landless or an international people, presents a great, a frightening danger for all other peoples of the earth.³⁰

It is here that we encounter the twisted logic that Jesus was a Jewish proselyte rather than a Jew. He was from Galilee, and therefore a Babylonian who was not Semitic at all, but probably in part Aryan.³¹ Such conclusions fueled the already radical ideas of Germans such as Kaiser Wilhelm, now living in his post-war exile in the Netherlands. He argued in 1923, partly under the influence of Delitzsch, that Jesus was not only an Aryan, a non-Jew, but in fact an anti-Jew who opposed the message of the Hebrew Scriptures. Wilhelm tried to make the case for religious reforms under the banner, "Out with Jewry and its Yahweh!"³²

What strikes us as remarkable after the passage of a full century is Delitzsch's inability to acknowledge that his views were anti-Semitic.³³ In his notes to the second lecture, published in 1903, Delitzsch contended that his views meant no injury or insult to Judaism and modern Jewish faith. Instead, he countered that his work was a "dispassionate, strictly objective discussion" of the issues such as the institution of the Sabbath, the role of women in Israel and Babylonia, and other topics.³⁴ The next year, he published a booklet in which he again defended himself against charges of anti-Semitism.³⁵ He portrayed himself as trapped between two unfair criticisms. On the one hand, he was accused of "Semitomania," but on the other hand of being anti-Semitic. He responded that the truth lay in the middle, since in reality he was neither a philo- nor an

²⁹ Delitzsch, *Die Grosse Täuschung*, 1:107–8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:105.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1:96, and 2:59–66.

³² See Larsen, "'Babel/Bible' Controversy," 105. Wilhelm was anticipated by Delitzsch (*Die Grosse Täuschung*, 2:62–66).

³³ One could make the case that he was aware of his anti-Semitism but did not believe it to be a thing to be condemned. In fact, the boldness of his anti-Judaism in *Die Grosse Täuschung* would support this argument. But this would lead us into psychological motivations that we believe we are in no position to analyze.

³⁴ "Leidenschaftslose, streng objektive Erörterung des Ursprungs der Sabbathinstitution, der Stellung der Frau in Israel wie in Babylonien und anderer derartiger Fragen kann unser Urteil nur schärfen, die Wahrheit nur fördern" (Delitzsch, *Zweiter Vortrag über Babel und Bibel* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1903], 39). In this reply to critics, Delitzsch continued to speak of a "dispassionate, historical-critical reinvestigation of the relevant documents" (*ibid.*, 42).

³⁵ Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel: Ein Rückblick und Ausblick* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1904), 57–66.

anti-Semite, but was simply seeking truth for its own sake, without any prejudice or bias.³⁶

It is instructive to critique Delitzsch's historical methodology on this point. The quotation just considered reveals in Delitzsch's reasoning the classic historical error often known as the "Baconian fallacy." This is the conviction that a historian "can operate without the aid of preconceived questions, hypotheses, ideas, assumptions, theories, paradigms, postulates, prejudices, presumptions, or general presuppositions of any kind."³⁷ The historian is like one gathering nuts and berries in the dark forest of the past until amassing enough to make a general truth. But this approach is impracticable in methodology and impossible in its objectives.³⁸ It has been exposed by various theorists in recent decades, and few historians today commit this fallacy as blatantly as in previous generations.³⁹ However, it would be foolish to deny its continued existence among scholars of the ancient Near East, or any other historical endeavor. As Fischer so graphically states, the "old error still survives, deep in the dark recesses of every historian's heart."⁴⁰ In biblical studies, the definitions of *exegesis* and *eisegesis* are sometimes easily contrasted and conveniently illustrate the point. Exegesis "is what I do," while eisegesis "is what you do."⁴¹ So historians, those who work in the ancient Near East included, are sometimes guilty of identifying the preconceived assumptions in anyone who disagrees with them, while arguing that they themselves are merely going wherever the evidence leads them without the vitiating effects of such assumptions.

Many other examples could be garnered to illustrate how Delitzsch was a willing participant in the intense anti-Semitism of his day.⁴² Suffice it to say, however, that Delitzsch was not alone in his racism, but rather he drank deeply

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 63; and see Delitzsch, *Die Grosse Täuschung*, 2:4.

³⁷ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 4. As Fischer notes, the label "Baconian" is unfair to its namesake, Francis Bacon, because it reflects an inaccurate understanding of his thought. We retain it here because it has become the conventional standard among historians and logicians.

³⁸ For more critique of the fallacy, see Fischer, *Fallacies*, 4–5.

³⁹ Interestingly, the classic examples of the Baconian fallacy among historians come from the nineteenth century (Fischer, *Fallacies*, 6), again revealing that Delitzsch was a reflection of his generation.

⁴⁰ Fischer, *Fallacies*, 7.

⁴¹ As Rabbi Chanan Brichto used to state frequently (with tongue firmly planted in cheek) to his students at Hebrew Union College.

⁴² For which see G. F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *HTR* 14 (1921): 191–254. For German biblical scholarship in the twentieth century, see Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 15–66; and Rolf Rendtorff, "Die Hebräische Bibel als Grundlage christlich-theologischer Aussagen über das Judentum," in *Jüdische Existenz und die Erneuerung der christlichen Theologie* (ed. M. Stöhr; Abhandlungen zum christlich-jüdischen dialog 11; Munich: Kaiser, 1981), 33–47.

from the well of anti-Jewish sentiment gushing up so feverishly in the young German state. By participating in the anti-Semitic culture of his time and place, he failed, like Wellhausen and others before him, to challenge his culture's theological and philosophical assumptions. He failed to present his culture with an alternate portrait of reality, and thereby he contributed to the historical and theological underpinnings of Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴³ Making a platform for later Nazism, Delitzsch did for theology what we once thought Nietzsche had done for philosophy. While the portrait of Nietzsche as an anti-Semite must be corrected in light of developments in Nietzschean scholarship over the last twenty years,⁴⁴ no such correction is needed for Delitzsch. This centennial review of Delitzsch's lectures has only confirmed his contributions to the anti-Semitism of his day.

Anti-Christian Sentiment

The charge that Delitzsch's lectures expressed views that were anti-Christian may be surprising in this context, and we admit it would certainly be a surprise to Delitzsch himself. Perhaps we should clarify immediately that we are not referring to his Lutheran heritage, which one might have expected (given the sociocultural climate of his surroundings) to lead to anti-Catholic elements in his research. Instead we refer here in the most general way to assumptions that run counter to Christianity in its broadest definitions; specifically, we refer to his attitude toward, and later his position against, the Hebrew Scriptures, or the "Old Testament" as they are known in Christian thought.⁴⁵

⁴³ Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon*, 20.

⁴⁴ The reopening of the Nietzsche Archive in Weimar in 1991 revealed that, after he was incapacitated, his sister Elizabeth suppressed certain of his writings against Germany and against anti-Semitism. One leading Nietzsche scholar has concluded that, contrary to Nazi propaganda and thus the widespread popular view, Nietzsche was not an anti-Semite (Weaver Santaniello, *Nietzsche, God, and the Jews: His Critique of Judeo-Christianity in Relation to the Nazi Myth* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994], esp. 137–54; idem, "A Post-Holocaust Re-examination of Nietzsche and the Jews," in *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture* [ed. J. Golomb; London: Routledge, 1997], 21–54).

⁴⁵ On the problems of terminology for confessional Christian scholars of the Hebrew Scriptures, see Christopher Seitz, "Old Testament or Hebrew Bible? Some Theological Considerations," in *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 61–74; Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 1–32; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 147–75; and idem, "Theology of the Old Testament," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies* (ed. D. W. Baker and B. T. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 459–61. Moberly's work provides a meaningful framework for Jewish–Christian dialogue. While not wishing to minimize the difficulties of confessional Jewish and Christian scholars working together on the Hebrew Scriptures, we should state that so-called Christian supersessionism is not necessarily endemic to Christian faith (contra Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 27 and passim). However, it is certainly a concept that found mul-

Like much of European biblical scholarship of the nineteenth century, Delitzsch manifested a fixation with the evolutionary and historical progression of the Christian religion from its early stages in the Hebrew Scriptures to the New Testament, how it declined from that expression under the influence of Greek metaphysics, and finally how it evolved again from the dissolution of dogma by Martin Luther into a new level of nobleness of heart.⁴⁶ This found fruition specifically for studies of ancient Israel in the famous construction of Wellhausen, which became the acceptable way of understanding Israelite religion. First, early Israelite religion was natural and free from law as expressed by Yahwistic and Elohist sources. Its cycles were related to the agricultural year, the priesthood was universal, and worship could take place anywhere. Second, the Deuteronomic materials reveal that Israel's sacred festivals were subsequently cut off from nature and given new dates based on mathematical calculations. The priesthood became the right of the Levites, and central worship was demanded. Third, the Priestly source reflected a religion in which the festivals were fixed on precise days of the calendar year, and while other festivals were retained, an entirely new one, the Day of Atonement, took precedence. The priesthood was limited to the descendants of Aaron, while all other Levites became lesser clerics.⁴⁷

The idea that religion had progressed through several evolutionary stages so pervaded nineteenth-century scholarship that many assumed religion was still progressing higher and higher to an ultimate good.⁴⁸ This notion was artic-

tifarious expression in church history, and more to the point of this paper, in Christian scholarship as it emerged from the Enlightenment. See Krister Stendahl, "Qumran and Supersessionism—and the Road Not Taken," *PSB* 19 (1998): 134–42; and Fredrick C. Holmgren, "The Old Testament and the 'New' in Jesus: Is 'Old Testament' a Suitable Title?" in *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change—Maintaining Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 119–38.

⁴⁶ Most notably in Delitzsch's contemporary and colleague in Berlin Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (3 vols.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1896–99).

⁴⁷ This schema is everywhere apparent in the *Prolegomena*, but perhaps best illustrated in his treatment of sacrifice: see Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983), 52–82; repr. of *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Enzies, with preface by W. Robertson Smith; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885); trans. of *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (2d ed.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883). See also Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), 25–27; and on the problems of evolutionary thought as particularly prevalent in Delitzsch, see Jacob J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel: A Comparative Study of the Hebrew and Babylonian Religious Spirit," *Commentary* 26 (1958): 431–44, esp. 442–44.

⁴⁸ The question of the influence of Hegel's idealism on Wellhausen via Vatke has been much discussed. See Ernest Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 50; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

ulated by none other than Kaiser Wilhelm himself shortly after Delitzsch's first lecture. In an address given November 29, 1902, the emperor spoke of freedom for the "further development of religion" (*Weiterbildung der Religion*), which appears to have been inspired by Delitzsch's lecture.⁴⁹ Indeed the concluding lines of Delitzsch's second lecture appeal to the same enthusiastic charge, in an apparent reference to the emperor's call for the further development of religion, to continue the struggle for a higher expression of religious enlightenment.

But on the other hand, let us not blindly adhere to antiquated, scientifically disproved dogmas, even perhaps out of fear, lest our belief in God and genuine piety thereby suffer injury. We consider everything earthly as in an active state of flux; standing still is synonymous with death. We gaze there at the mighty, pulsating power, with which the German Reformation serves great nations of the earth in every aspect of human work and human progress! However even the Reformation is only a stage upon the way to the goal of truth, which has been placed before us by God and in God. To that end we strive in humility, but with all the means of free scientific investigation, cheerfully declaring our allegiance to the *further development of religion*, which has been seen from the high watch-tower with eagle glance and proclaimed as the lively slogan for the whole world.⁵⁰

Following on the success of the first lecture, this conclusion to the second seems to assume that the power of the German empire, with its resources to support Delitzsch's own work and that of other enlightened scholars, has ushered in the time for a new religious construction. The observations from ancient Mesopotamia discussed in the lectures will free humans from the vitiating effects of the older Hebraic religion and make it possible to move beyond it to a higher expression of faith, one that presumably Delitzsch himself will articulate with the help of Wilhelm II.⁵¹

1973), 82; and Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 11–12. For a rebuttal of the influence of Hegel on Wellhausen, see most notably Lothar Peritt, *Vatke und Wellhausen: Geschichtsphilosophische Voraussetzungen und historiographische Motive für die Darstellung der Religion und Geschichte Israels durch Wilhelm Vatke und Julius Wellhausen* (BZAW 94; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1965). The question here is not whether or not Wellhausen was self-consciously aware of any influence or the degree to which he purposefully explained the history of Israel's religion using Hegel's philosophy. We are more interested in the general impact of Idealism on Wellhausen, Delitzsch, and their colleagues in the late nineteenth century.

⁴⁹ So Larsen, "'Babel/Bible' Controversy," 100.

⁵⁰ Delitzsch, *Zweiter Vortrag*, 37 (emphasis ours); and Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 183–84.

⁵¹ Such a position was so transparent that Wilhelm began to put distance between himself and Delitzsch shortly after the second lecture. See Johanning, *Bibel-Babel-Streit*, 53; Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 211–20; and Larsen, "'Babel/Bible' Controversy," 101–2.

Delitzsch's commitment to the further development of religion is merely the backdrop to another, more central question, which he elaborated specifically in his second lecture. Early in the lecture he began to explain in detail his approach to the Hebrew Scriptures as something other than "divine inspiration," and he rejected altogether the Hebrew Scriptures as "inspired" word of God. He subsequently responded to his vehement critics by stating that in their day they had reached "the end of the theological and the beginning of the religio-historical treatment of the Old Testament."⁵² What had been only implied in the first lecture was openly stated in the second: Christian religion should be fundamentally renewed and no longer needs the Old Testament.⁵³ In this he came close to the classic position of Adolf von Harnack, who said famously:

The rejection of the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake which the Great Church rightly refused to make; the retention of it in the sixteenth century was due to a fatal legacy which the Reformation was not able to overcome; but for Protestantism since the nineteenth century to continue to treasure it as a canonical document is the result of a religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.⁵⁴

This quotation is often cited as an example of anti-Semitism in German biblical scholarship, which it certainly is. But we suggest it is also anti-Christian, as the reaction of the church to Harnack attests.⁵⁵

Thus Delitzsch's views should be seen not only as anti-Semitic but also as anti-Christian.⁵⁶ Both of the programs we have discussed here—further development of religion and rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures—need critiquing from the Christian point of view. First, one would be hard pressed to locate in primitive Christianity the concept that Christian faith is itself contributing to an ongoing evolutionary progression from primitive expressions of noble worship

⁵² Delitzsch, *Zweiter Vortrag*, 41; and see Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible: Two Lectures Delivered before the Members of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft in the Presence of the German Emperor* (ed. C. H. W. Johns; Crown Theological Library 1; London: Williams & Norgate; New York: Putnam's Sons, 1903), 220.

⁵³ Johanning, *Bibel-Babel-Streit*, 52.

⁵⁴ Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche* (TU 45; rev. and enl. ed.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924), 217.

⁵⁵ Martin Rumscheidt, ed., *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at Its Height* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 14–33.

⁵⁶ His anti-Christian positions have been eloquently summarized by Huffmon: "In dealing with Assyriological matters, as Delitzsch did in his first two lectures, he combined scholarship with special pleading; in dealing with Old Testament materials, Delitzsch mixed learning with considerable naivete; in dealing with the New Testament, or, more specifically Jesus, Delitzsch displayed naivete and perfidy" (Huffmon, "Babel und Bibel," 319).

to higher versions. In fact both Judaism and Christianity are marked by similar calls to "keep this festival," so that Passover for Israel and the Lord's Supper for Christians were benchmarks of the past that served to summon believers to remember and conform to the salvific configurations of history. In both, the danger lies in moving beyond the primitive, constitutional formulations of faith. Though both may be said to contain an *Endzeit*—an ideal eschatological culmination of faith in the future—that *Endzeit* is something new while at the same time a returning rather than a surpassing of the *Urzeit*. Second, the question of Christianity's relationship to the Hebrew Scriptures is complex and certainly not as easy to sever as Delitzsch would make it seem. Christians of every generation have confronted this question, sometimes with troubling results, while many consider it the central question of Christian theology. Regardless of the definition or explanation of Christianity's relationship to the Hebrew Scriptures, Christianity has continued to insist that a relationship still exists, indeed *must* exist.⁵⁷ From the second century until the present, the church has continued to insist that any form of Christianity that can do without the Hebrew Scriptures is no genuine Christianity.⁵⁸

It is possible that Delitzsch's anti-Christian positions are at times attributable to negative reactions against his family and childhood faith. His father was Franz Julius Delitzsch (1813–1890), who was appointed professor at Erlangen in 1850 and Leipzig in 1867. He was without doubt one of the most beloved and revered professors of the Hebrew Scriptures of his generation.⁵⁹ It is surprising, therefore, that in a brief autobiography published shortly before his death, Friedrich Delitzsch gave no room to the influence of his early faith and family.⁶⁰ Instead, he attempted to portray himself solely as the famous academic he had become, while also trying to dismiss charges of anti-Semitism. As has been commented upon by Reinhard Lehmann, this autobiographical

⁵⁷ See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 670–71. In essence, "Old Testament theology" from a Christian perspective is a formulation of the relationship between the two testaments (see Matitiahu Tsevat, "Theology of the Old Testament—A Jewish View," *HBT* 8 [1986]: 33–50).

⁵⁸ The date refers, of course, to Marcion's attempt to compose a canon of Scripture in conformity to his anti-Jewish bias, which contained only a version of the Gospel of Luke, ten letters of Paul, and his own work entitled *Antitheses*. Marcion taught that the God of Jesus was not the same as the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, and that in fact the God of the Hebrews should be rejected. However, it was Marcion who was rejected by the church in Rome, beginning during his lifetime in the second century C.E. With the leadership of Irenaeus and Tertullian, the early church of the second and third centuries rose to the challenge, and with Augustine in the fourth century the issue was finally settled. See Childs, *Old Testament as Scripture*, 42; and John J. Clabeaux, "Marcion," *ABD* 4:514–16.

⁵⁹ Siegfried Wagner, *Franz Delitzsch: Leben und Werk* (BEvT 80; Munich: Kaiser, 1978).

⁶⁰ Friedrich Delitzsch, "Mein Lebenslauf," *Reclams Universum* 36 (1920): 241–46, reprinted conveniently in Johanning, *Bibel-Babel-Streit*, 339–45.

account makes no mention of religion or theology in the context of Delitzsch's youth or childhood home.⁶¹ While such information might be unexpected and its absence thus without any significance, we agree with Lehmann that Delitzsch's silence on the topic is particularly interesting in light of his fond recollections of his "ideale goldene Jugendzeit" in Erlangen, which he claimed continued to shed sunshine well into the later years of his life.⁶² Lehmann continues by lamenting the lack of evidence for the father's influence on the son, though the pietistic Lutheran devotion must have been a formative influence in his life. Though every indication is that Franz and Friedrich had a favorable relationship,⁶³ Friedrich's subsequent rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures and vitriolic response to his Catholic and Lutheran critics may find their roots in a desire to distance himself from his childhood faith.

In his reply to critics of the second lecture, Delitzsch includes a passing mention of his father. In a passage in which he is responding to charges from a fellow biblical scholar (Ernst Sellin) that he has been late by nearly a century to argue against divine revelation in the Bible, Delitzsch contrasts his situation in the current controversy with his father's career. Whereas Franz Delitzsch was slow to adopt the results of historical-critical investigation, he was finally compelled toward the end of his life "by the weight of the facts of Old Testament text criticism" to make the smallest possible concessions for the book of Genesis. As a result of having made such concessions, Franz was persecuted even while on his deathbed by the denunciations of church synods.⁶⁴ The son, Friedrich, now argues that the controversy caused by his second lecture only demonstrates the gap between academy and church. This rare reference to his "dear father" may also reveal the distance Friedrich sees between the work of the two. The father was the devout Lutheran scholar who made only slight adjustments to his critical positions during his career, while the son not only rejected the inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures but also denied their usefulness and validity for contemporary Christians. One can hardly imagine greater distance between father and son who are both academics working in the same discipline, and this would not be the first time an academic has jettisoned confessional positions partly as a defense mechanism.

⁶¹ Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 59.

⁶² Delitzsch, "Lebenslauf," 242.


⁶³ Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch*, 60 n. 109.

⁶⁴ "Als mein teurer [sic] Vater Franz Delitzsch sich gegen sein Lebensende durch die Wucht der Tatsachen der alttestamentlichen Textkritik bewogen sah, in der Genesis auch nur die kleinstmögliche Konzession zu machen, wurde er noch auf seinem Sterbebett (1890) von Warnungen ganzer Synoden verfolgt" (Delitzsch, *Zweiter Vortrag*, 40). See also the revealing autobiographical reference to his "strict orthodox Lutheran family" in *Die Grosse Täuschung*, 1:9.

II. Conclusion

At the centennial of the "Babel und Bibel" lectures, our intent has been to consider Delitzsch and his method in the context of his time and place in order to gain a heuristic depth perception after the passage of a full century. Delitzsch was a brilliant Assyriologist, one of the most distinguished scholars of the time. But beyond his philological accomplishments, he also left behind a legacy of uncritical political nationalism and questionable assumptions. In this light, Delitzsch stands as a singular reminder of the importance of the way in which we relate our research to our context.

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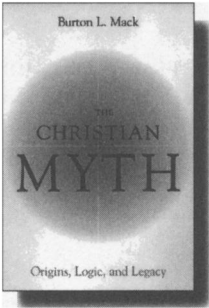
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