


Article

Rewriting the Torah: The Response of the Deuteronomists and Returnees to the Disasters

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Abstract: The Documentary Hypothesis proposed by Julius Wellhausen has sparked discussions for over a century. The core of this debate revolves around the perspective through which the creation of the Torah should be viewed. Previous studies have often neglected the focus on “people”. The Torah was created by individuals and was profoundly influenced by the era in which they lived. In this specific study, instead of concentrating on the texts or historical background, we should focus on the “authors” or “redactors”, exploring how they processed and created the texts under the influence of their times. In Jewish history, the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom played a crucial role in the creation of the Torah. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the Deuteronomists, reflecting on historical lessons, formulated a set of legal norms for theology and society, which established theological standards for further interpreting and writing ancient Jewish history. Following the destruction of the Southern Kingdom, Diaspora group and Returnees, centered on reflecting on their catastrophes and responding to contemporary crises, further created and integrated texts of ancestral traditions and the Promised Land, embedding the historical memory of ancestors-land for the Jewish people.

Keywords: the documentary hypothesis; the Torah; Deuteronomist; Returnees; historical memory



Citation: Zhang, Shuai. 2024.

Rewriting the Torah: The Response of the Deuteronomists and Returnees to the Disasters. *Religions* 15: 747.<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060747>

Academic Editor: Dyron B. Daugherty

Received: 28 May 2024

Revised: 15 June 2024

Accepted: 17 June 2024

Published: 19 June 2024



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1. Introduction

The core of the academic debate on the Documentary Hypothesis is the perspective from which to view the creation process of the Torah. Scholars, particularly Wellhausen, focus primarily on the literary differences among the texts. This perspective brings about several problems: first, it relies heavily on subjective judgment, making it difficult for the academic community to reach a consensus on the division of texts. Second, the concept of the “text” is not clearly defined, leading some scholars to continue dividing texts into more categories.¹ Although the Tradition-Historical Criticism of Gerhard Von Rad and Martin Noth has a certain influence, the existing problems cannot be underestimated. Von Rad’s “creed” theory is mainly based on Deuteronomistic texts and cannot be used as a theoretical basis for discussing the history of early Israel. Noth’s theory of Torah formation is based on his theory of the 12 tribes. However, his theory of the 12 tribes has been widely questioned by academic circles, and few scholars support this view (Whybray 1987, p. 49). William Foxwell Albright pursues “objective” historical truth based on archaeological evidence. However, the process of interpreting archaeological materials and reconstructing historical background is fraught with subjective speculations. Consequently, Albright’s theory has not gained widespread acceptance in the academic community (Rimson 1983, p. 57; Finkelstein 2007, p. 10; Van Seters 1999, pp. 53–57).

Therefore, it is impossible to scientifically reconstruct the creation process of the Torah from a literary, historical, and archaeological perspective. Previous studies have often overlooked the importance of the “people” behind the texts. The Torah was created by individuals who were deeply influenced by the times in which they lived. In specific research, the focus should shift from “texts” or “history” to the “authors”, exploring how they processed and created the texts under the influence of their era, ultimately integrating these elements into the Torah.

2. Revision of the Documentary Hypothesis

In 722 B.C., the Kingdom of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was destroyed by Assyria. Although the theological traditions of the North suffered a devastating blow, some traditions survived. It is a scholarly consensus that the E tradition in the Torah exhibits strong characteristics of Northern Kingdom theology (Whybray 1987, p. 27; Cross 1973, p. 293; Ska 2006, p. 132). After a long period of debate, scholars have finally reached a consensus on the boundaries of the E tradition (You 2007, p. 203). Scholars primarily identify the E tradition based on the use of different names for God. However, Baden argues that this approach is largely misleading (Baden 2012, pp. 21–22).² He further proposes that attention should be shifted to the “narrative flow” of the texts (Baden 2012, pp. 28–29).

Baden’s viewpoint holds significant reference value. Relying solely on the name of God as the basis for distinguishing between the E and J traditions tends to only scratch the surface of the texts. Additionally, Baden observed that after *Exodus* 3, the name of Elohim could no longer be consistently utilized (Baden 2012, p. 104). This viewpoint has also been recognized by other scholars (Whybray 1987, pp. 23–25). If we further extend Baden’s theory, we will find that in *Amos* and *Hosea*, the expression of Elohim reappears, reflecting a longer coherence in its usage.³ Meanwhile, some scholars have observed that even in *Genesis*, certain texts considered to be part of the E tradition do not use the term Elohim, such as *Genesis* 15 (Ska 2006, p. 132). Similarly, other scholars have also observed the mixing of the names Yahweh and Elohim in certain texts (Van Seters 1999, pp. 37–38).⁴ Using Elohim instead of Yahweh is viewed as a redactional or scribal activity with a late post-exilic tendency (Whybray 1987, p. 70). In other words, Elohim was utilized much later than Yahweh. From the perspective of the creative process, the replacement of Yahweh with Elohim is a deliberate action by the redactors. Merely relying on the difference in the name of God as a basis for dividing the original text is inadequate. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the distinct theological traditions of the Northern and Southern regions as the basis for division. Accordingly, the J tradition originates from the South, while the E tradition originates from the North.

The new question is whether J and E can be effectively distinguished. It is obvious that after a series of purposeful compilations by redactors (R^{JE})⁵, J and E achieve further integration. For this reason, these traditions are often referred to together as the “JE”, i.e., the part of the Torah other than the “Priestly Tradition” and the “Deuteronomic Tradition”. Indeed, despite the existence of some vague boundaries between J and E, it remains challenging for most scholars to effectively distinguish between them (Whybray 1987, pp. 28, 35). The texts within the Torah are all traced back to earlier sources. Like all early works in human history, these texts passed through an oral tradition stage, as seen in examples such as the Homeric epics and the *Historical Records*. Oral tradition is both diverse and extensive. Even before the Israelites had formed a distinct national consciousness, certain oral traditions had already begun to emerge. Therefore, within the oral tradition of the Israelites, one can find cultural elements from the Canaanite ethnic groups. Over time, as these traditions were passed down orally, their content continued to evolve and diversify. Determining the extent to which the compilation process was influenced by oral versus written tradition, however, remains a challenging task (Whybray 1987, p. 134). The processes of oral and written transmission should not be viewed as necessarily mutually exclusive or chronologically distinct. Similar to other traditions, such as Islam, oral transmission often persists even after a text has been written down, and the two modes of transmission mutually influence each other (Whybray 1987, p. 180).

Due to the ambiguity of oral tradition and the shared oral tradition between J and E, distinguishing the boundaries of texts between them becomes more challenging. Although J and E eventually produced texts with distinct characteristics, there is still a process of integration between them. In other words, before J and E are initially integrated, they have already undergone a certain degree of natural integration.⁶ Therefore, the integration of JE is a cumulative process, which should not be regarded as works of a certain period but rather focused on their integration process. On the one hand, J and E reflect the respective

theological thoughts and social conditions of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. On the other hand, after further compilation by R^{JE}, additional theological reflection themes were integrated into the JE text.

If the role of R^{JE} is solely attributed to harmonizing materials, polishing texts, and making corrections or supplements, it will undoubtedly underestimate the contribution of R^{JE}. JE is not simply a product of “scissors and paste”; rather, it reflects a deep inner logic and profound reflection on Israel’s history, reality, and religion. It is worth noting that R^{JE}’s adaptation of sources is not unrestricted; instead, it is constrained by the sources themselves. Some sources were clearly already written and widely circulated. For these texts, R^{JE} has limited creative space.

The core question is, who is R^{JE}? Von Rad regarded the integration of J as the work of the Yahwist, who worked during the period of the United Monarchy. However, the very comprehensiveness and richness of the total theological content of J would seem to be more appropriate to an Israel that had experienced disappointment and suffering than to a much earlier Israel in its heyday (Whybray 1987, p. 96). Scholars such as H.H. Schmid have argued that J is a product of the exile period and is strongly associated with the Deuteronomists (Campbell and O’Brine 1993, pp. 10–12). All signs indicate that there is indeed a theological ideology of the Diaspora in J. So, how do we understand the creative process of J? In fact, this is related to the further processing and creation of JE by R^{JE}. As previously emphasized, the integration of J and E is a cumulative process, signifying that their integration unfolded over a long historical period. Within this process, two historical events stand out as particularly significant: the Deuteronomic Reform and the destruction of Jerusalem (Ska 2006, pp. 185–86). The Deuteronomists, with the law as its core, based on J and E, initially processed, created, and integrated J¹ and E¹. They also integrated new texts (D) and formed J¹E¹D.⁷ Building upon this foundation, the Returnees further integrated the traditions of the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom (J² and E²) while also incorporating the Priestly source (P). The completion of the Torah signifies the culmination of the final integration of JE. Due to the intervention of Diaspora group and Returnees, J has obvious theological ideology of the Diaspora period. Therefore, the integration of JE traversed through the stages of oral tradition, natural integration, the initial integration by the Deuteronomists, and ultimately, the final integration by the Diaspora group and the Returnees.

The motivation of R^{JE}, according to Whybray, is to preserve the traditions of the Northern Kingdom (Whybray 1987, p. 27). In the JE text, E occupies a relatively small space. Therefore, the purpose of R^{JE} is not solely to preserve the traditions of the Northern Kingdom. From a historical perspective, the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. and the subsequent disappearance of the 10 tribes of Israel caused a profound impact on the people of the Southern Kingdom. This event prompted a theological reflection on the reasons for the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and aimed to enhance the internal cohesion of the Jewish people. King Josiah initiated a reform centered on reshaping the authority of the law, known as the Deuteronomic Reform. As the initial redactors of JE, the Deuteronomists sought to strengthen the authority of the law and rewrite the early history of the Jewish people. In this process, their concern was not merely to elucidate older texts but to transform them in accordance with their theological and ideological agenda (Levinson 1979, p. 15; Stackert 2012, pp. 48, 51–63).

The Returnees achieved the final integration of JE and were also the ultimate redactors of the Torah. The P tradition is generally believed to be divided into two main parts. The first part consists of editorial frameworks and additions that are interwoven throughout the narrative from *Genesis* 1 to *Exodus* 24. These include the origins of certain rituals, family lineages, etc., such as the Sabbath in *Genesis* 1 and circumcision in *Genesis* 17. These additions do not form independent narratives but rather accept existing JE narratives and are edited to express P’s theological concerns. The second part comprises a significant body of text concerning worship, sacrifice, priesthood, and even a code of daily life. This section includes *Exodus* 25–31, 35–40, and continues through *Numbers* 10:10 (You 2007, p. 372).

It should be noted that JE did not achieve its final merger before the Returnees. The compilation undertaken by the Returnees encompasses not only J and E but all the texts of the Torah. Traces of editing by the Returnees have been found in texts attributed to J, E, and D. As the ultimate redactors of the Torah, the Returnees had an additional purpose. In terms of time, the creative process of the Returnees can be divided into two stages:

The first stage is the Diaspora period. It is scholarly consensus that in *Deuteronomy*, there are texts composed by the Diaspora community, and their ideas are present throughout the Torah (Nelson 1981, pp. 119–28). Unlike the Deuteronomists, dispersed historians experienced firsthand the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Therefore, they were not awakened by the downfall of other countries but rather explored the theological reasons for the disasters of their own country. In this regard, Diaspora historians have focused on reflections on their sins, as well as on the confusion of the present situation of the Jewish people and their expectations for the future (Römer 2000, p. 118). As a result, the expectation for return gradually arose within this group, and the theological awareness of the “Promised Land” began to emerge. At the same time, it is very likely that during this period, the concept of the ancestral genealogy of “Abraham-Isaac-Jacob” also began to appear.

The second stage is the return period. Before this, the Kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian Kingdom, and the elites were taken captive to Babylon. When Cyrus permitted Jews to return to Judea, the Jews living in the area had become heavily assimilated by Gentiles, which raised alarm among the Returnees. It can be seen from *Ezra* that the Returnees undertook a series of reforms at this time, the core of which was to strengthen blood relationships. Consequently, the Returnees incorporated this idea into their final integration of the Torah. Simultaneously, during this period, the relationship between ancestors and land was clarified. As descendants of their ancestors, the Returnees further bolstered the legitimacy of the act of return and their possession of the land.

In comparison, in Deuteronomic theology, ancestral narratives are rarely used as the starting point for theological exposition. However, P constructs its overall narrative around the ancestral stories to emphasize the theological theme of “promise-fulfillment” in the ancestral stories (You 2007, p. 380). Therefore, the Returnees constructed an ancestral narrative that unified the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, emphasizing the blood inheritance of the Jews since ancient times. In terms of the historical narrative of the Torah, the Returnees added narratives designed to underscore the transmission of bloodlines, with a significant portion located primarily in *Genesis*. Additionally, as the ultimate redactors, the tracing of ancestors by the Returnees is integrated into various scriptures of the Torah.

To sum up, the narrative in the Torah originally originated from oral tradition, including the tradition shared by the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (tradition G), as well as the respective traditions J and E of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Over time, these oral traditions gradually coalesced into texts with uncertain boundaries. They referenced and merged, and after being transmitted for hundreds of years, they were utilized by the Deuteronomists.⁸ The Deuteronomists restructured the historical narrative of Israel with “law” as its core. Building upon this foundation, the Returnees achieved the final integration of J and E, as well as the completion of the Torah, with blood inheritance as the core theme. Regarding the integration process of JE, it is notable that the groups in the Southern Kingdom predominantly influenced the Torah compilation process. Therefore, E traditions often exist in fragments and lack narrative coherence.

3. The Deuteronomists’ Response to the Disaster

Cross believes that there is an important mainline in the so-called Dtr¹, which focuses on the trial and punishment of the sins of the Northern Kingdom, particularly those of Jeroboam (Cross 1973, p. 279).

In the Hebrew Bible, Jeroboam is a strongly condemned figure who committed many sins, such as his rejection of the Jerusalem Temple, his promotion of the golden calves for worship at Bethel and Dan, his changes to the liturgical calendar of Israel, his appointment

of non-Levites to the priesthood, and others (Sweeney 2013, p. 35). The core question revolves around the legal rationality of these positions. In other words, during the division of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, did Judaism have unified laws and worship procedures, and were they consistent with the descriptions provided by the Deuteronomists?

According to *Exodus*, as early as the time of Moses, Judaism had a unified law. First, the Decalogue, also known as *Exodus* 20:3–20:17, mainly consists of two parts: the first is worship of Yahweh; The second is social moral standards. Among them, the most important are the first two commandments. The first of the Decalogue states, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (*Exodus* 20:3; *Deuteronomy* 5:7)” It is also mentioned in *Deuteronomy* 4:39 that “Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else”. (*Leviticus* 20:6; *Numbers* 33:5; *Deuteronomy* 4:23; 5:8) Similarly, the prohibition of images became central to Jewish law. In *Exodus* 20:4–5, it is stated, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me”. These two commandments constitute the uniqueness of Judaism and the heterogeneity of the Jewish people. After the Decalogue, there is the “Covenant Code”, i.e., *Exodus* 20:22–23:19, which mainly involves all aspects of social life. The Decalogue and the “Covenant Code” formed the legal basis of Jewish religion–society and became the basis for the subsequent formulation of Jewish law.

The question is whether these laws, as described in *Exodus*, are inherited from the era of Moses. Presently, scholars hold two extreme views on the ideological and textual origins of the Covenant Code (Westbrook 2009, p. 92). Other scholars believe that the Covenant Code originated within Israel itself (Morrow 1994, p. 151). It is certain that the Covenant Code was not formed at one time but went through a complex compilation process. Raymond Westbrook believes that the Covenant Code was formed in the early monarchy or even the pre-monarchy period, i.e., in the 10th century B.C. (Westbrook 2009, p. 92). Jean-Louis Ska believes that the first compilation of the Covenant Code could hardly be earlier than the 8th century B.C. or the 7th century B.C. (Ska 2006, p. 214). Scholars hold significant controversy over the origin and final compilation time of the Covenant Code. However, based on current research, it is unlikely that the Covenant Code was written and passed down unchanged from the time of Moses to the present day.

When considering the Decalogue alone, there are also numerous doubts:

From a historical perspective, following the death of King Solomon, the United Kingdom of Israel split into two countries. In terms of religious beliefs, King Jeroboam established a set of religious worship methods different from Jerusalem to distinguish himself from the Kingdom of Judah. He placed a golden calf in Bethlehem and Dan for the worship of the people.⁹ This way of worship is widely recognized in the Kingdom of Israel, but it conflicts with the “prohibition of images” in the Decalogue. There are still differences among scholars regarding when these prohibitions appeared. Some scholars believe that the explicit prohibition of images should not be dated before the exilic period (Feder 2013, p. 255). Other scholars believe that the ideology of “prohibition of images” emerged in the 8th century B.C. (Mettinger 1979, pp. 24–25). Indeed, from an objective standpoint, it is difficult to understand that all 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom have violated the law. This suggests that during the era of King Jeroboam, or even prior, Jewish beliefs were diverse, and the religious principles outlined in the Decalogue were not universally acknowledged. Related studies have indicated a lack of internal coherence within the text of the Decalogue (Childs 1976, p. 339). In essence, traces of editing across different historical periods indicate that the compilation of the Decalogue underwent an extensive process. This suggests that the Decalogue was subject to revisions and alterations over time. Further evidence supporting this notion can be found in the Samaritan Version of the Torah, where the Decalogue differs from the Hebrew Bible (Tsedaka 2013, pp. 172–73). This

implies that the Decalogue was not yet in its final form, at least at the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom.

From an archaeological perspective, prior to the 10th century B.C., Judah existed as only a chiefdom, lacking the characteristics of a full-scale state. It was not until the 8th century B.C. that Judah began to develop into a small state (Jamieson-Drake 1991, p. 139). Although this view has a high reference value, it has also been challenged by other materials. For instance, the Merneptah Stele, dating to the late 13th century B.C., attests to the presence of Israel as a nation, not a state. Conversely, the Mesha Stele and Kurkh Monoliths from the mid-9th century B.C. suggest the existence of a state referred to as the Kingdom of Israel, specifically indicating the Northern Kingdom. Similarly, references to the Kingdom of Israel and the House of David dynasty appear in the Tel Dan Stele from the late 9th century B.C. These findings suggest that both the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah were in existence by at least the mid-9th century B.C. (Lehmann 2003, pp. 117–62).

Although the United Monarchy was still in a blank stage, archaeological evidence shows that from the 12th century B.C. to the 10th century B.C., Israel was in the process of developing from a nation to a country. Even until the first half of the 8th century B.C., there were no large cities around Jerusalem, and cultural activities and production activities in this area were underdeveloped (Finkelstein and Silberman 2006, pp. 262–63). Hence, doubts persist regarding the existence of a unified and formidable United Monarchy as depicted in the Hebrew Bible. Even if such a kingdom did exist, based on historical development, its centralizing strength would likely have been limited, making it challenging to enforce laws uniformly across the territory. Therefore, archaeological evidence suggests that the portrayal of a grand unified monarchy in the Hebrew Bible is more of an ideological construct than an accurate historical depiction (Finkelstein 2020, p. 113). Therefore, the North and the South are likely to retain their own living customs and religious customs. This also explains the seemingly alternative way of worship in the North. In 1975, scholars discovered two inscriptions (painted on clay pots) and many images dating from the 9th to 8th centuries B.C. at Kuntillet 'Ajrūd in the northeastern Sinai Peninsula. Judging from the content of the inscriptions and images, Yahweh was not the only God but had a consort named Asherah (Gnuse 1997, pp. 69–70; Dever 1984, pp. 21–37). An inscription from the mid-eighth century B.C. was found at Khirbet el-Qôm, near Hebron. The inscription makes it clear that Asherah was a goddess who was the consort of Yahweh (Gnuse 1997, p. 71; Hadley 1987, pp. 50–62; Shea 1990, pp. 110–16). Therefore, around the 8th century B.C., Judaism was probably not a One-God religion. Whether “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” in the Decalogue has been recognized at this time is still a question worthy of further discussion.¹⁰

The Decalogue, in its present form, is the culmination of a lengthy historical evolution that can be traced back to oral tradition (Childs 1976, p. 391). It is important to note that I do not deny the antiquity of the Mosaic Law and agree with W. F. Albright that the reliability of the Mosaic tradition rests on the ancient oral and textual traditions behind the sources of the Torah (Albright 1976, pp. 120–31). In other words, the Mosaic tradition (including the Law of Moses) is not a later fabrication but has a long oral and textual history. Even so, the authority of the Mosaic tradition (the law) was not established until much later.

Jewish law is the result of self-reflection on national disasters, and there is a lot of theological reflection on the demise of the northern and southern kingdoms. The important question is: who is the reflective agent in this process? Robert K. Gnuse believes that the loss of national identity will lead the survivors of the North to express a new self-understanding that will focus more on religious identity than political identity (Gnuse 2000, p. 209).¹¹ Indeed, reflective texts predominantly originate from the Northern Kingdom. However, a critical question emerges: can the E preserved in the Torah adequately represent the values of the Northern Kingdom? As previously mentioned, the composition of the Torah primarily encompasses two significant phases: the work of the Deuteronomists and that of the Returnees. Both groups hail from the Southern Kingdom, thus imbuing the Torah with predominantly Southern concepts and values. Despite incorporating some

texts from the Northern tradition in the creation process, the dominance of the Southern tradition is evident in the crafting of the Torah, reflecting the overarching reflections of the Deuteronomists from the Southern Kingdom on the two calamities (Levinson 1979, p. 154).

In the process of reflection, the Deuteronomists did not “create” everything in the Torah but inherited, utilized, and supplemented the old materials, therefore establishing relatively fixed text boundaries and establishing broader legal authority to serve practical religious and political needs. The re-conceptualization of *Deuteronomy* was accompanied by the idea of “one unique God, one unique people, one unique temple”. This was the period when the conditions were right for conceiving the first historical and theological synthesis of Israel. In fact, a new perspective had to be created after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C. (Ska 2006, p. 195).

Focusing on establishing legal authority and shaping national identity became an inevitable choice for the Deuteronomists. They used legal means to strengthen the centralization of the religious domain. The first two commandments of the Decalogue highlight the uniqueness of Judaism and underscore the distinctiveness of the Jewish nation (Mettinger 1979, p. 16). As a result, after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the Deuteronomists developed a set of theological and social legal norms centered on reflecting on historical lessons. This framework also established the theological criteria for the further interpretation and writing of ancient Jewish history.

4. Response of the Returnees to the Disaster

In 538 BC, with the permission of Cyrus II, some Jews returned to Judea. At this time, the Jewish nation was facing a serious crisis:

According to the records of the Hebrew Bible, a temple dedicated to Yahweh was purportedly completed during the reign of King Solomon, and it is known as the first temple in history. For historians, whether King Solomon and this temple existed is still a question worthy of further investigation. A temple for centralized worship undoubtedly existed, at least during the period of Josiah. This establishment fostered a centralized religious system that bolstered Jewish national identity. However, this system faltered with the eventual destruction of the Temple. In *Ezra* 9:1, it is clearly stated that “The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites”. At this time, the Jews living in Judea once again returned to a religious life of polytheism and idolatry. It can be seen through the account in *Ezra* that there was an ideological conflict between the remaining community in Judea and the Returnees from Babylon.

The confusion surrounding religious beliefs led to an identity crisis among the Jewish people, particularly exacerbated by the prevalence of intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles. From *Ezra* 9:2, “For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass” Thus, Ezra asked the Jews “give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever”. (*Ezra* 9:12) It can be seen that the Returnees tried to implement a policy of racial purification and emphasized the absolute core value of blood inheritance. Obviously, for the people of Israel, the return to their native land at the end of the exile not only posed the challenge of the laborious reconstruction of an environment in which to live and in which to express themselves again but also required that they grapple with the remaking of a past and of an identity in which they could recognize themselves, and by means of which they could manage to overcome the many internal tensions they had to face (Giuntoli 2020, p. 354).

To strengthen the cohesion of the Jewish nation, the Returnees, serving as the final compilers of the Torah, emphasized the tracing of Jewish national history, particularly focusing on the Patriarchal Narrative. In fact, the names “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”

appear together several times in *Deuteronomy* (1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 9:27; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4). The texts primarily focused on the Promised Land, a theological awareness that gained prominence during the Diaspora. From the perspective of the Torah's integrity, it seems that the Patriarchal Narrative had not yet received significant attention from the authors, at least when *Deuteronomy* was written. In the original conception of *Deuteronomy*, Jewish national history was traced only to the time of Moses. Hence, the genealogy of the patriarchs in *Deuteronomy* appears to be an insertion from the early days of the Dispersion. Though the exact timing of the establishment of the "Abraham-Isaac-Jacob" genealogy is uncertain, it likely penetrated the Jewish national consciousness during and after the Dispersion (Na'aman 2015, pp. 157–61).

By constructing the Patriarchal Narrative, Returnees further attributed the Jewish nation to a single origin. In other words, both the North and the South are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thus constructing the collective memory of a unified nation. Among the Patriarchal Narrative, the Jacob story is the most representative. And the origin of this story is divided among scholars. Some scholars believe that the Jacob story originated in the Northern Kingdom before the 8th century BC; other scholars believe that although the Jacob story has ancient origins, the final version should have been created during the Diaspora Period or the Return Period (Na'aman 2014, pp. 96–98; Finkelstein and Römer 2014, pp. 317–19). On this basis, Nadav Na'aman suggests that all the plots of Jacob's story should be attributed to the creation after the destruction of Israel, and the final compilation was completed in the 6th century B.C. (Na'aman 2014, pp. 100–10). It is worth noting that if all episodes of the Jacob story were composed in a later period, its credibility would be limited. A story that only circulated for more than 200 years could not be integrated into the Jewish national beliefs in the 6th century B.C. Therefore, Jacob's story probably had a long oral tradition. Research by Israel Finkelstein and others shows that the oldest plot in the Jacob story can be traced back to the Iron Age, i.e., the late 11th or 10th century B.C. The earliest texts about Jacob appear roughly in Bethlehem in the 8th century B.C. (Finkelstein and Römer 2014, pp. 325–27).

The Jacob story originated in the North, while the Abraham story and Isaac story originated in the South (Pury 2006, p. 53; Von Rad 1966, p. 58). How can stories from different traditions be integrated into a unified Patriarchal Narrative?

First, the integration of the Jacob story, Abraham story, and Isaac story is a long process. Israel Finkelstein believes that the integration of the Patriarchal Narrative began roughly after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. and that this integration reflects the "Pan-Israelite" ideology that may have begun in the time of Josiah (Finkelstein and Römer 2014, pp. 332–33). He further suggests that a nation composed of mixed Southern and Northern groups—made it necessary to strengthen the coherence of this united monarchy by creating one story that combined Southern and Northern traditions (Finkelstein and Römer 2014, p. 333). In fact, judging from the purpose of Josiah's reform and the texts of the Deuteronomists, even if this "integration" exists objectively, it is just an unconscious integration of various traditions in the natural spread process. The purpose of Josiah's reform was to strengthen centralization by emphasizing religious centralization rather than to strengthen the common national consciousness of the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Indeed, the Deuteronomist texts frequently cast the North in a negative light, depicting it as the Other. From the text of *Deuteronomy*, it is clear that Deuteronomists were not only familiar with the Jacob tradition but also strongly rejected and resisted it (Pury 2006, pp. 55–56). Therefore, from the standpoint of official creation, the time when the ancestral tradition was integrated, especially the Jacob tradition, into the Abrahamic–Isaacic tradition must not have been during the Josiah's Reform period. It was only during and after the Dispersion that the Jews had real needs to strengthen the common identity of the North and South (Pury 2006, pp. 69–70).

Second, although there is a Northern tradition in the Patriarchal Narrative, in essence, it is still a Southern perspective and is an important means for Returnees to build a "new Israel" (Finkelstein and Römer 2014, p. 319).¹² Among the Patriarchal Narrative, the Jacob

story is an important manifestation of the combination of Northern tradition and Southern perspective. In *Genesis* 32:22–32:32, there is a scene where Jacob wrestles with the angel of God. In this episode, Jacob was given the name Israel because of his victory. Thereafter, Israel in the Torah refers specifically to the entire “nation”, including the Southerners and the Northerners. The problem with this story is that a work eventually compiled by a group that returned from the Southern Kingdom named Jacob, one of the patriarchs, as Israel, the name of the Northern Kingdom. This suggests that in the process of compiling the Torah, the Returnees intentionally incorporated the Patriarchal traditions of the North into the traditions of the South. As a result, the South and the North share a unified national origin and historical memory. At the same time, in the Torah, Jacob gave birth to 12 sons, which were the prototype of the later 12 tribes of Israel. The composition of the Patriarchal stories, which created a common past for the inhabitants of the former kingdoms of Israel and Judah, formed a decisive step in the efforts to create a common history and identity for the two communities that remained in the land (Na’aman 2014, p. 118). This also constitutes a symbol of the unity of “New Israel” (Na’aman 2014, p. 114).

The theological sense of the “Promised Land” permeates the Patriarchal Narrative based on the construction of a common lineage. In *Genesis* 12:7, the Lord appeared to Abram and said: “Unto thy seed will I give this land”. This is the first time a “promise” for land occurs in the Torah. In fact, the Promised Land is clearly a late insertion in the narrative since the main scene of the story takes place in Egypt, not Canaan. In *Genesis* (13:15; 26:3; 28:4, 13; 35:12), it is mentioned many times that God gave the land to the ancestors and their descendants. There has been much debate in the academic community as to when the sense of “Promised Land” arose. However, this question has never been answered conclusively (Von Rad 1966, pp. 74–93). What is certain is that the notion of a “Promised Land” is pervasive throughout the Hebrew Bible text, with its prevalence notably increasing around the 6th century B.C.

During the creation of the Torah, the Returnees precisely defined the relationship of the Promised Land to the ancestors (Von Rad 1966, p. 90). In the Torah, the relationship between the land and the descendants of the ancestors is mentioned many times (*Genesis* 15:18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3–4; 28:4; 28:13; 35:12; 48:4; *Exodus* 32:13; 33:1; *Deuteronomy* 1:8; 11:9; 34:4). It is worth noting that the Promised Land in the Torah was not only bestowed upon the ancestors themselves but also upon their descendants. In most texts, the focus is not solely on the ancestors; rather, the emphasis lies on the gift of land to his descendants, as highlighted by the author. In this way, the Promised Land established a further link with the descendants of the ancestors, particularly the Returnees. From the perspective of the Torah, the Promised Land is regarded as the rightful inheritance of all descendants of the ancestors (Na’aman 2015, p. 172). For the “New Israel”, the act of return itself symbolizes the inheritance of ancestral property, imparting a profound sense of mission, responsibility, and both theological and secular legitimacy to the group. Through the meticulous construction by the Returnees, the historical memory of “ancestors—land” was deeply ingrained in the Jewish people.

5. Conclusions

The Documentary Hypothesis of Julius Wellhausen sparked discussions for more than a hundred years. Essentially, the focus of the debate is the perspective through which the creation of the Torah should be viewed. In previous studies, the scholars lacked attention to “people”. The Torah was created by “people” and deeply influenced by the era in which they lived. In the specific study, instead of focusing on the “text” or “historical background”, we should focus on the “author” or “redactors”, exploring how they processed and created the texts under the influence of their times.

The integration of the Torah was a long and complex process. With the law as its core and J and E as its foundation, the Deuteronomists initially processed, created, and integrated J¹ and E¹ and incorporated the new text (D) to form J¹E¹D. The Diaspora group and Returnees further explored and integrated the North and South traditions while

incorporating the P into them. The completion of the Torah marks the final fusion of J and E. Therefore, the integration of J and E went through the oral tradition stage, the natural integration stage, the initial integration of the Deuteronomists, and the final integration of the Diaspora group and the Returnees. In the process, the group's ideology was also integrated into the creation of the Torah.

In essence, the creation of the Torah was a response of Jews to two disasters. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the establishment of Torah authority as the centerpiece of national identity became an inevitable choice for the Deuteronomists. The Deuteronomists used the law to strengthen the centralization of the religious sphere. The first two commandments of the Decalogue constitute the uniqueness of Judaism, as well as the uniqueness of the Jewish people. The Deuteronomists predates the Decalogue to the time of Moses and constitutes the standard for theological criticism of Israel's past.

Following the fall of Jerusalem and the collapse of the Temple, Jewish historiography entered a new phase. The traditional way of writing history can no longer meet the needs of ethnic construction and cope with new challenges. The Returnees played a pivotal role in this transition by integrating Patriarchal traditions and constructing the genealogy of "Abraham-Isaac-Jacob". This emphasized the singular lineage of the Jewish people and highlighted the blood ties between the Northern and Southern populations. Building upon this foundation, the Patriarchal Narrative in *Genesis* became a repository of theological reflections, incorporating themes such as exile and the promise of land. In essence, the patriarchal narratives of *Genesis* are a composite of historical memory, traditional folklore, cultural self-definition, and narrative brilliance (Hendel 2005, p. 46). Moreover, it achieves a fusion of historical fact, historical memory, and theological consciousness.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Once the origin of the text is traced back to oral tradition (which is indeed the case), the so-called "texts" are difficult to clarify. This has led many scholars to focus on J, E, D, and P and continuously refine more basic classifications, such as Dtr¹, Dtr², DtrH, DtN, etc., resulting in an endless process of exploration (Faust 2019, pp. 173–218).
- ² The views of other scholars: (Sasson 2002, pp. 7–8, 84–87; Whybray 1987, pp. 63–72; Van Seters 1994, p. 23).
- ³ Especially in *Hosea*, there is a mixed-use of Elohim and Yahweh.
- ⁴ In fact, there is still controversy in the academic community about whether J exists (Römer 2006, pp. 9–27). Among them, the most representative scholar is Rolf Rendtorf, whose denial of J almost shook the foundation of the Documentary Hypothesis (Rolf Rendtorf 1977, pp. 108–35). Indeed, the problem of the Documentary Hypothesis is that the scholars cannot reach a consensus on the boundaries of the texts, which provides an excuse for many scholars who oppose this theory. This article will discuss the existence and division of the texts in the following content.
- ⁵ In the study of the Documentary Hypothesis, scholars hold contradictory definitions of redactor. On one hand, it was used to refer to individuals who sequentially combined the documents (J, E, D, and P) without adding any content of their own. On the other hand, the redactor is depicted as having complete control over the material, reshaping it, and adding their own content and perspective to the extent that they become indistinguishable from the original author, effectively supplanting them (Van Seters 2006, p. 391). Baden is more cautious; on the one hand, as he commented on R^JE: "R^JE has been seen as responsible not only for the interweaving of J and E but also for numerous additions from his own hand. In some cases, these additions have been considered necessary corrections to the factual discrepancies between J and E". (Baden 2009, p. 209). On the other hand, Baden disagreed with the idea of broadening the role of the redactor. (Baden 2009, p. 210). The creation of the Torah is not a mechanical process, and thus, there are no redactors who mechanically integrate texts. From a literary perspective, there are indeed some additional insertions into the texts that are often attributed to "redactors". However, compared with the literary perspective, this article focuses on "creators" or "authors", emphasizing the individuals who lived in historical contexts. From this viewpoint, there are no neutral "redactors". In other words, even if so-called "redactors" exist, they must belong to

a certain group, such as the Deuteronomists or the Returnees. Therefore, in this paper, no distinction will be made between “redactors” and “authors”; instead, they are collectively referred to as “redactors”, representing the group of people who created and integrated texts. The function of “redactors” mainly includes two parts: creating texts and integrating texts. The “redactor” is not a single person but rather a “group” from different eras.

- 6 In this article, “natural integration” refers to the integration of oral traditions or texts in the process of folk circulation. This kind of integration is a spontaneous act among the people, not led by a certain group, and it does not have an official ideology.
- 7 The redactors of D showed a strong preference for the narratives of E rather than J? The problem is that it is generally believed that E is the tradition of the North, J is the tradition of the South, and the redactors of D is the Deuteronomists of the South. If we consider from the perspective of the “redactors”, it seems that the redactors of D should prefer J.
- 8 The oral tradition extends beyond the early history of Israel and continues to incorporate additional oral traditions in subsequent creations (Van Seters 1999, pp. 49–50).
- 9 Archaeologists discovered a calf statue near Samaria in the North Kingdom (Stahl 2021, pp. 68–69).
- 10 For related studies: (Stahl 2021, pp. 45–94; Kratz 2010, p. 6). For a study of the other commandments: (Blum 2011, pp. 293–94).
- 11 Many scholars emphasize the transfer of Northern traditions to the South (Finkelstein 2013, p. 150; Stahl 2021, pp. 45–94). These views have certain reference values, but the problem cannot be ignored. Finkelstein believes that the Jacob narrative and the Exodus narrative were introduced from the Northern Kingdom to the Southern Kingdom (Finkelstein 2013, pp. 141–51). The question is, if the Jacob narrative is a Northern tradition, why did Southern writers incorporate it into the Torah and their ancestral narratives? The only answer is that the Northern and Southern countries probably share the same ancestral memory. Likewise, the Exodus narrative resulted in the Israelites’ covenant with God, which was centered on the law and especially the worship of the One God. Such a tradition is unlikely to come to the Northern Kingdom, which believes in polytheistic worship.
- 12 In Na’aman’s view, the earliest Jacob narratives are based on oral traditions by (Southern) writers of the Diaspora (Na’aman 2015, pp. 168–71). However, for a literary (historical) work, further analysis of the internal information of the texts can lead to the latest date of the texts’ composition, which does not help discuss the earliest date of the texts’ composition. In Na’aman’s analysis, the presence of a large number of Southern elements in Jacob’s narrative confirms the Southern perspective of Jacob’s narrative.

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