

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

MAY, 1896.

ART. I.—THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH.

NO. VI.—THE WORLD BEFORE THE FLOOD.

I MAY, perhaps, be allowed to preface this paper by a few general remarks as to the present condition of the question of the genuineness and authorship of the Pentateuch, as between the old and the new critics. It appears to me—and the remarks in my last paper may serve to emphasize the fact—that a gradual *rapprochement* is taking place. There is a decided tendency to abandon extreme views on either side. Many disciples of the traditional school are disposed to admit the possibility of sundry errors in minor detail, in numbers, and the like, in the Old Testament. They no longer insist that Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch with his own hand, or that it is absolutely impossible that the so-called Books of Moses may have been edited at a considerably later date, and that sundry alterations and additions to its contents may have been made. They are also ready to admit that Mosaism stands on a lower plane than Christianity, and that since the coming in of the “better covenant” Christians have been compelled to relinquish some of the teaching of the older one as inadequate, and therefore no longer binding upon the Christian conscience. On some points, however, they confront their adversaries with countenances unabashed and hearts thoroughly impenitent. They still refuse to believe that assumptions are as solid a basis of argument as facts, or that the agreement on the part of a few critics of a certain school at the present time is on an equality with the unwavering traditions of a whole nation. They, therefore, are inclined to reject the whole *apparatus* of Jehovists, Elohist, Deuteronomists, and Priestly Code writers, as elaborated on insufficient or mistaken *data*, and they invite those who wish to arrive at sound conclusions on the matter to lay aside these foregone conclusions and to

approach the whole question afresh with unbiased minds. They rejoice to have secured the adhesion of Professor Sayce to these views. Formerly, like many other men who have no time to carry on an independent investigation for themselves, he was disposed to accept the theories of the German school provisionally, as being the only conclusions of criticism known to him. Now, having secured for himself, as he supposes, a sufficient basis of fact, he has announced that he has thrown away the corks and bladders provided for him by the critics, that he has found them more of a hindrance than a help, and that he proposes to give himself a free hand in all future investigations. As thought is free, and critics not infallible, there seems no reason why Professor Sayce should not examine the facts afresh for himself. It is only the somewhat dictatorial attitude of the critics towards those who venture to declare themselves unconvinced which causes any amount of friction in the matter. There *are* some grounds for doubting whether their canons of historical investigation are quite so certain as they think them. Not only has the Bishop of Oxford, the most distinguished historical investigator we have, declared plainly that those canons would be "laughed out of court" in any other branch of historical study but the history of Israel; not only has Dean Milman, a Hebraist, a historian, and a man of letters, declared the task the critics have set themselves to be one impossible to be achieved, but Professor Bury, one of the most brilliant of our rising historical scholars, has recently laid down a principle of investigation in regard to the alleged heresy of Justinian which is certainly not that of Kuenen or Wellhausen, or even of their English disciples. "The principle is," says Professor Bury, "that neither (1) arguments resting on considerations of improbability—impossibility is a different matter—nor (2), as a general rule, arguments *ex silentio*—which are, indeed, merely a particular case of 1—can be used to invalidate positive evidence which is not on independent grounds suspicious, *unless there exist some positive evidence on the other side.*"¹ If this principle be admitted as a sound one—and it seems reasonable enough—a large number of the conclusions of the new criticism must at once be abandoned. The new critics appear to be becoming aware of this fact. With great silence and secrecy, with their camp-fires left burning so as not to attract the notice of the enemy, they have of late been executing a strategic movement to the rear. I will give two instances of this. A short time ago Ezekiel was the "father of Judaism," and the post-exilic institutions of the Priestly Code were mainly due to his initiative. This we

¹ *Guardian* for 1896, p. 362. The italics are Professor Bury's own.

learned from Wellhausen and Kuenen. Now, the Priestly Code is a codification of pre-existing regulations, and we are not definitely told of what date any of those regulations are. Therefore some, or even many of them, may, for aught the critics can tell us, be traced as far back as the age of Moses itself. A short time ago Deuteronomy was composed in the time of Hezekiah or Manasseh, or even that of Josiah, by the advocates of a monotheistic worship at one sanctuary. Now this extreme theory is abandoned, and Deuteronomy has become a *compilation* of that period, embodying a considerable amount of pre-existing materials. Once more we can gain no information regarding the date of those materials. It is by no means impossible that, according to the most recent theories on the subject, there is, after all, in Deuteronomy a tolerably substantial amount of Mosaic teaching and legislation. For we are not told precisely, as criticism, if it has arrived at a sound basis for constructive operations, ought to tell us, *what* portions of Deuteronomy are, and what are not, of the date of Hezekiah or Manasseh. And the reason of this indefiniteness is obvious. It renders it less easy to join issue with the theorist. If you have no theory to deal with but a negative one, there is nothing to lay hold of. We can hardly enter into a general engagement with an enemy who presents no front to us, or who is constantly changing his ground. All we can do in such a case is to act as the opponents of the Tübingen theory, in regard to the authenticity and genuineness of the New Testament, acted. We can challenge our opponents to take up a position which it is possible to attack; and failing this, we can hover around them, cut off stragglers, and generally harass their retreat, until they make a stand and enable us to come to close quarters. The position of Wellhausen and Kuenen was definite enough. It has been attacked; and the present attitude of the English disciples of that school is sufficient evidence that it has not been maintained. No doubt one strong reason for the ready reception the new theories have met with from men of every theological school among us is the escape they provide us from the necessity of accepting the miraculous. If the Pentateuch were written by Moses, or under his supervision, there is no escape whatever from the marvels of the ten plagues of Egypt, the manna, the quails, the fiery flying serpents, the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all the other miraculous events with which the story of the Pentateuch is studded. It is best to face this fact frankly. The larger demands on our faith or credulity the Bible makes, the harder it is in these days to get men to accept it. The theories of the critics afford an easy method of minimizing this difficulty, and hence their wide

acceptance, even in the most unexpected quarters. Yet, however this unquestionable difficulty is to be met, it is perfectly clear to my mind that to admit the Old Testament Scriptures to be a tissue of fabrications from end to end, to grant that they have failed to attain the object for which they were written, namely, to give a faithful account of God's training of His people, is to pay too heavy a price for our converts from Agnosticism or unbelief. The canons of criticism we have adopted in the Old Testament will unquestionably be applied to the New, and we shall once more find ourselves called upon to surrender to the Tübingen school the positions we have won from them at the cost of so much labour.

In the present state of the controversy it is not unreasonable to hope that the final conclusion criticism will reach will be this—that the Israelite history as it has come down to us is at least as credible as any other history; and that, with whatever shortcomings in point of detail, we have in it an authentic account of God's moral education of the people which He destined to play so conspicuous a part in the religious history of the world. As far as I myself am concerned, I honestly confess that I do not accept the theory of Elohist, Jehovist, and the like, and I claim the right of examining into the signs of antiquity and common authorship of the Pentateuch without any reference to the assumptions those theories involve. "I refuse to believe," to use a favourite expression of Wellhausen's, that all inquiry in the matter is at an end because certain persons monopolizing the title of scholars have declared the question to be settled. Still, the theories may be true, or approximately true. The only point on which I should be disposed to insist is this, that when the writers of the Old Testament made definite assertions on points of moment, they spoke, and knew that they were speaking, the honest truth.

I will now return to Gen. v. 1, which I have previously discussed, but on which I have a few more words to say. In two points it seems to indicate a common authorship with the passage ii. 4b—iv. 26, which, as we know, has been assigned to JE. For P, in Gen. i. 26, 27, does not use the word *Adam* (man) of the *individual*, but of the *race*. It is JE who speaks of "Adam" as a *person*. It is true that at first he uses the article with Adam, to denote the person as distinct from the race; but by degrees the article is dropped. In chap. iv. 25 we have "Adam" for the first time,¹ not "the man." The same use of the word occurs *five verses afterwards*, yet here it is assigned to P. The exigencies of a theory may

¹ There is אָדָם in Gen. iii. 21.

justify this treatment; but certainly any critic who had no theory to maintain would come to the conclusion that chap. iv. 25 and chap. v. 3 were by the same hand. It is also to be observed that in chap. v. 1—3, we have both P's and JE's use of the word "Adam." This is as near an impossibility as anything can be, if Gen. v. be by a different hand to Gen. ii. to iv. It is as natural as possible if they are both by the same author.

The next point is that P and JE both refer to the birth of Seth, though P makes no reference to the previous birth of Cain and Abel. The irresistible conclusion from this, it seems to me, is that the so-called P here, instead of displaying traces of a different hand, is carrying on naturally and smoothly the narrative of JE. Yet P, be it observed, is *ex hypothesi* an independent narrator. Had his story really been independent, it would certainly have made some reference in chap. v. to the existence of the *eldest* son of Adam, this being his method throughout. Nor is the editing of the redactor usually supposed by the critics to be so careful as to cause him to take great pains in removing every inelegant repetition. On the contrary, it is owing to his carelessness on this point—to the continual repetitions he introduces into the narrative—that the critics are enabled to infer the existence of the two combined accounts. From this there can be no other conclusion than that the editor was extremely careful to avoid repetition when it suits the theory that he should be so; extremely careless when it is desirable to be able to point out the separate sources of the narrative. Here again, then, we have signs of the common authorship of JE and P.

But we have not yet done with the redactor's extracts from P. Let us put them together, so that we may be able to read the passage consecutively. It runs thus: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended the work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made. These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created. This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God created He him; male and female created He them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created."¹ It appears from this that P, in conception and arrangement, must have been an extremely remarkable book. We are forbidden to see here the hand of the redactor, because we are specially

¹ Cf. Gen. i. 26, 27, and ii. 4b.

told that the word "Tol'doth" (*generations* or *origin*) is characteristic of P. That the historian of the creation, having turned aside to narrate the fall and its consequences, should recapitulate what he had said before about the origin of the human race before proceeding to trace its early genealogy, is reasonable enough. But what could have possessed the writer of P to indulge in so tedious and aimless a repetition as that given above is extremely difficult to understand. Surely, if he had used his favourite phrase, "these are the generations," at the end of the first division of his narrative, he would hardly have put it in such extraordinary juxtaposition at the beginning of the next. There is, of course, another alternative, but it is one to which the critics are somewhat chary of resorting. Portions of P may have been omitted here. But then the question arises: What were they, and why were they omitted? If we have not the contents of P almost *in extenso*—and it is the critical theory at present that nearly the whole of P is embodied by the redactor in his work—how do we know that P is so "juristisch, pünktlich, and formelhaft" as we are told it is? Anyhow, as we have seen, P knows the story of Seth. Is it possible that he, too, gave us his version of the fall of man, of the crime of Cain, and the like? And if so, why was his narrative less to the taste of the historian than the blended account of JE?

The story in chap. vi. next invites our attention. It has been contended in a previous paper that the elect line of patriarchs, as described in chap. v., maintained a more primitive kind of life than the restless and selfish descendants of Cain, who were urged by what has lately been glorified as a "Divine discontent" to invent for themselves new conditions of society. Invention, in fact, was in the first instance stimulated by impatience and greed of gain. Some sort of pastoral life, it is true, must have been known from the first, for Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a tiller of the ground.¹ Jabal² can only, therefore, have been the inventor of a more elaborate system of pastoral occupation. But many of the descendants of the elect line were seduced by the prospect of gain to join the descendants of Cain; and this, it may be presumed, is what is meant by the sons of God coming in unto the daughters of men. The descendants of Seth, stronger, healthier, and longer lived than the degraded posterity of Cain, not only followed the example of, but entered into the closest possible relations with, the lost and proscribed race. Thus crime multiplied; and we find from JE that the wickedness of the earth was so great that God resolved to destroy it. After chap. vi. 8 the

¹ Gen. iv. 2.

² Gen. iv. 20.

redactor takes his matter from P. But Noah is equally well known to JE. We first meet him in a passage belonging to JE torn from its context (chap. v. 29), beginning: "And he" (Lamech, presumably) "called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which Jehovah hath cursed." JE, then, had something to tell us, not only about Noah, but about Lamech, his father. It is natural to wonder why the redactor has passed by his more picturesque details, and has given us only P's more formal genealogy. Noah's three sons, moreover, are known to JE, though he introduces them very incidentally (Gen. ix. 19) in a passage—I refer only to verses 18 and 19—dry and formal enough to have obtained for it a place in the selections from P. One cannot but express a hope that the criticism which has done so much for us already may be enabled to do more—that it may recover for us the lost portions of the narrative of JE, which the redactor has so ruthlessly, and apparently, too, so inconsistently flung away.

Another remarkable feature of the compilation is the way in which JE's *lacunæ* are filled up from P. JE tells us that the world is to be destroyed; P here comes to the rescue, and tells us how it was to be destroyed, and that God commands Noah to build the ark. But it next dawns upon us (chap. vii. 1) that all this is known to JE also. He, too, mentions the ark;¹ and he describes Jehovah as inviting Noah to "come into the ark," into which He had before prophesied (chap. vi. 18) that Noah should "come."² It is true that in chap. vi. 1-8, and in chap. vii. 1-5, Jehovah is used, and Elohim in chap. vi. 9-22. But we really need some more grounds than the change of the Name of God to make it credible that the redactor, instead of keeping to one plain, straightforward story, has combined the two narratives, which must have been singularly like each other, in this extremely remarkable manner, when we see the earlier writer so distinctly referring here to a phrase in the later narrative. Perhaps it ought to be enough for us to know, on unimpeachable authority, that it is so. But man is an inquisitive being, and we may be sure that he will, sooner or later, require an answer to the question *why* it is so. For myself, the more I contemplate the phenomenon of the redactor, the more mythical, I confess, he appears to me to be. I cannot account for him, except on the principle that "it is the impossible that always happens," or on that of Tertullian's triumphant ejaculation, "Credo quia impossibile." And what is more to the purpose still, no one else has as yet been able to account for him. Something more than the mere change

¹ As already constructed.

² Observe that P here anticipates the language of JE.

from the word Elohim to the word Jehovah seems to be required to bring him "within the range of practical politics" in this particular passage.

Yet further eccentricities on his part have to be detailed. It is curious that he cannot wait till (in chap. vi. 1) he begins his extracts about Noah from JE, but must thrust a scrap about Noah from JE into the middle of the genealogy with which P has supplied him. Of course, if the whole of these chapters are by one author, all is intelligible enough. He is writing his history, and when he comes upon Noah, he naturally introduces his name with a word of preface. But if we were making extracts from two or more writers, we should not, I think, be inclined to interrupt the course of one extract—especially when copying out a genealogy—in order to interpolate anything from another author unless necessity required it. An ordinary redactor would certainly have waited till chap. vi. before he introduced the little detail about Noah which we find in chap. v. 29. The answer will most probably be that the redactor here is not an ordinary person. This is a proposition which we do not feel at all inclined to dispute.

My next point is that verse 2 is obviously derived from very ancient sources indeed. It is not at all the way in which a man living under the Kings of Israel or Judah would have expressed himself. Unless all the accounts of Solomon are myths, a high civilization must have been introduced into Israel in his reign, and the simplicity of the earlier epochs would have been impossible. Whether we interpret the term "sons of God" of supernatural beings, as some are inclined to do, or of the descendants of Seth, which is the view taken above, it seems impossible that this sentence can have been written in the time of the kings. For the first view suggests a very early period indeed of human thought and history, while the second surely requires not only a familiarity with the details in chap. iv., but with the genealogy, assumed to be post-exilic, in chap. v., the contents of which seem presupposed in chap. vi. 2.

Then the mention of Noah in verse 8 suggests another difficulty. Why did the redactor leave out the interesting details about Noah, which JE must have inserted between chap. v. 29, and the narrative which begins in chap. vi. 1?¹

¹ The only possible way in which the reader can follow me here is to put either the supposed JE's or P's narrative in brackets. Chap. v., with the exception of verse 29, is assigned to P. Chap. vi. 1-8 is assigned to JE. Put chap. v. 29 into immediate juxtaposition with chap. vi. 1-8, and we find a *lacuna* in JE's narrative, which is filled up from P. What could JE have contained at this point, and why did the redactor leave it out? That is the question I desire my readers to consider.

Once more—if the narrative extracted from P in chap. vi. 9-22 be considered by itself, it seems to presuppose what has been extracted from JE in chap. vi. 1-8. The reason why God established His covenant with Noah only would seem to be given in verse 8 as well as in chap. vii. 1 (also assigned to JE), and to have some connection with what precedes, namely, what I have suggested to have been the marriages of the chosen seed with the apostate Cainite race. The history as it stands is homogeneous and intelligible. Its separation into extracts from various independent authors not only solves no historical difficulties for us, but it introduces an infinity of new ones. From the point of view of the ordinary historical investigator, then, though not, of course, of the Biblical critic, it must be rejected.

We turn once more to the literary side of the question. Is it for a moment likely that P could have written the following consecutive sentences: "And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations; and Noah walked with God. And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God," etc. That a single author might thus repeat himself after having diverged from his subject awhile (see chap. vi. 1-8) is probable enough; but it is barely possible that he could have written the above sentences consecutively. Another point, too, must be borne in mind. If chap. v. 29 be an extract from JE, then some portion of P must have been omitted to make room for it. For with verse 29 omitted, the extract runs thus: "And Lamech lived one hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son. And Lamech lived after *he begat Noah* five hundred ninety and nine years." Did the redactor himself think that the word "Noah" in verse 28 would be an inelegant repetition, and substitute "a son" for it, in sharp contrast with every former sentence in the genealogy? If so, his regard for elegance here is very decidedly contrary to what we are told is his usual practice.

From general literary criticism we turn to some linguistic considerations. First of all, the Niphal of the verb *שחת* only occurs in the sense *to be corrupt* three times in the Bible. Of these, two are here (verses 11 and 12), and the other in Exod. viii. 20 (A.V. 24), which is assigned to JE.¹ The word *קץ* (verse 13), in the sense of *end*, is not very common in Scripture, and a large proportion of the times in which it

¹ The Niphal occurs in Jer. xiii. 7 of the "marring" of a girdle, in xviii. 4 of the spoiling or "marring" of a vessel in the hands of the potter, and we find the participle used adjectively in Ezek. xx. 44.

occurs are in the Pentateuch. But we will postpone the consideration of this word till we meet it again in chap. viii. 6. In verse 14 we meet with the phrase, מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ (within and without). The first of these words occurs only in P; but the second not only meets us frequently in P, but is found also in Gen. xix. 16, xxiv. 11, Exod. xxxiii. 7, Numb. xv. 35, 36, which are assigned to JE. We meet with it seldom in Deuteronomy, and only ten times in the rest of the Old Testament. We may remark, in passing, on the unusual construction זֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה (this is the way in which thou shalt make).¹ And in verse 17 we ought not to fail to notice the characteristic and striking phrase, מַבּוּל מַיִם ("deluge," or "flood of waters"), which recurs in an inverted form in chap. vii. 10, which the critics have assigned to JE. In this last form the words occur in chap. vii. 7, which they have assigned to P. In other cases the words "flood" and "waters" occur separately. If the use of any particular form of expression is really characteristic of any particular writer, as the critics tell us, then one would have thought the word "flood" or "deluge" (מַבּוּל) would be characteristic of one writer, "waters" (מַיִם) of another, and "waters of the flood" and "flood of waters" of two more. Thus we once more come to the conclusion at which we have already arrived,² that *variations of expression by no means necessarily indicate diversity of authorship.*

Our last point is not linguistic, but historical. It is slight, but significant. JE, in chap. viii. 6, makes an allusion to the orders given in chap. vi. 6, which, according to the critics, were not published till centuries after JE was written—a window was to be made in the ark. That window is mentioned in JE's narrative.³ The word used is different, and on critical principles would seem to postulate diversity of authorship. We have just seen on how very slender a foundation this theory rests. And here *unity* of authorship seems to be postulated by the natural and undesigned allusion to the fulfilment of the injunctions which we find in chap. vi. 16. Another point has just occurred to me. JE (in chap. vii. 1) speaks of the ark as made (*cf.* chap. viii. 6; also JE); yet JE gives us no allusion to the making, or of any instructions to that effect. Thus once more JE presupposes P, or the earlier the later account.

¹ There is no "it" in the Hebrew. ² CHURCHMAN, April, 1896, p. 345.

³ If, with some, we take the former word (צֹהַר) to mean *roof*, this argument falls to the ground. But I must once more remind the reader that if one argument of this character is disproved, it does not in the least affect the others. It only detracts to a slight extent from the cumulative effect of the whole.