

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 *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE V.

THE FALL AS A COMPOSITE NARRATIVE.

BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM WALLACE MARTIN.

THE tradition of Eden as it has been kept in the Hebrew Scriptures, is fraught with the profoundest teachings; at least so it is thought by Christian teachers and theologians. Yet on the face of the narrative, as we read it in Genesis, strangest incongruities obtrude themselves. Dr. Marcus Dods sets them out in clearest language. He says: "The narrative throughout speaks of nothing but the brute serpent; not a word is said of the devil, not the slightest hint is given that the machinations of a fallen angel are signified. The serpent is compared to other beasts of the field, showing that it is the brute serpent that is spoken of. The curse is pronounced on the beast, not on a fallen spirit summoned for the purpose before the Supreme; and not in terms which could apply to a fallen spirit, but in terms that are applicable only to the serpent that crawls."¹ Without question, each characteristic indicated in this quotation is present in the narrative as we have it in Genesis. Expositors require exactly what is not in the narrative, in order to confirm their interpretations; and they are obliged to excuse on various pleas the literal serpent, his change from the upright to the crawling being, his eating of the dust.

Such incongruities would be pardonable in Grimm's fairy tales, but scarcely commend themselves in the weighty narratives of Scripture. The critical exegete has relegated the Eden-story to the realm "of marvel and myth." And

¹ Expositor's Bible, Genesis, p. 15.

the higher critic follows the same path. Wellhausen says: "The garden of Deity is, however, on the whole somewhat naturalized (in the Hebrew narrative). A similar weakening-down of the mythic element is apparent in the matter of the serpent; it is not seen at once that the serpent is a demon. Yet parting with these foreign elements has made the story no poorer, and it has gained in noble simplicity [he should have written, in childlike grotesqueness]. The mythic background gives it a tremendous brightness; we feel that we are in the golden age when heaven was still on earth; and yet unintelligible enchantment is avoided [!], and the limit of a sober chiaroscuro is not transgressed."¹ Lugging all this stuff into this early narrative, makes it evident that the higher critic is no less a special pleader than the accomplished theologian.

Consistency even in a mythic fable requires that the speaking serpent have the crawling mode of locomotion, without any suggestion of an upright form; and a national tradition alone could admit a demon-serpent, having form not unlike that of the man. Critical scholarship seeks some rational answer for the peculiarities of this Eden-narrative. Higher critics would have eliminated the difficulties under the plea of "redactions," if they had had at heart the establishing of the traditional views of Scripture, which the church has held most sacred, rather than their overthrow. The first question which comes to an investigator, in facing the difficulties of this narrative, is, Could the original record have suffered displacement in its parts, so as to have occasioned these incongruities? Assuming this to be true, we gain nothing by simply saying that these are due to redactions. All the facts for our study we have in Genesis. Are they capable of being rearranged so as to make a consistent narrative, and give suggestive instruction? The question is purely one of analysis and synthe-

¹ Prolegomena, p. 305.

sis. Perhaps by rearranging and excerpting, a single narrative might be evolved, which would feebly answer our requirement; but it would be verbose and repetitious, having those traits of literary style which are unpardonable in a writer. The right to make excerpts, moreover, would always be a contestable procedure. Time would be wasted in this line of investigation.

A reasonable scientific certainty of truth would be reached, if this strangely constructed narrative, as it is recorded in Genesis, were found to be the result of the commingling of two narratives together, provided these two narratives were to be reproduced. Of course the materials of these two narratives must be found in Genesis; each should be full, not one an outline and the other dealing in details; and when restored, the narratives should conform to the grammatical requirements of the Hebrew. If any part is excluded, it must be because neither narrative could give it place consistently within itself. The present article contains such a solution of the difficulties in the recorded text. Close scrutiny has led scholars to surmise that the record was composite. "Some difficulties attach to the mention of two trees in this verse (verse 9). In iii. 3 the divine prohibition appears limited to one tree, described as the tree of life, which is in the midst of the garden. From the sequel (ii. 17) it is plain that the words really designate the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and not, as in verse 9, the tree of life. The permission in iii. 2 (as in ii. 16) really extends to the tree of life; whereas in iii. 22 the danger that its fruit also may be eaten is averted by the expulsion of the first pair from the garden. Budde, accordingly, has conjectured that the original Eden-story contained but one tree; a later hand incorporated the second from another source; and he thus accounts for the somewhat awkward order of ii. 9b."¹

¹Oxford Hexateuch, Vol. ii. p. 3.

The separation of these two narratives is proposed as the object of this article. Each separate part will be referred to the chapter and verse where it is found; the chapter being placed above the verse numeral. What is common matter will be placed in small capitals. The Revised Version will be followed as near as possible. All the reasons, of course, cannot be assigned in the brief space of this article. The congruity of the narratives, however, and the mutual confirmation which one gives the other, it is hoped, will be reasonably conclusive and justify the rearrangement.

THE GARDEN-HOME.

J.

‡ And Jehovah God had made to
‡ grow out of the ground | in
‡ Eden | every tree that is pleasant
to the sight and good for food;
¶, and the tree of life. | And Je-
hovah God took the man, and
put him into the garden to
dress it.|

E.

‡ And Jehovah God had planted
the garden and there he put
the man whom he had formed|
¶, ‡ to keep it. | And the tree of
the knowledge of good and
evil was in the midst of the
garden.|

The assumption in each narrative at its beginning is, that there was somewhere a spot, specially favored because of its trees. This was Eden, where God placed Adam. Each garden had a peculiar tree; one narrator called it the "tree of life"; the other called it the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Man was given occupation in the garden according to both accounts. The narratives so far are essentially alike.

THE COMMAND OF GOD.

¶, ‡, And Jehovah God said, |
‡ The tree of life | ye shall not
eat of it lest ye die.|

¶, And Jehovah commanded the
man, saying, Of every tree of
the garden thou mayest eat; |
¶, but of the tree of knowledge of
good and evil thou shalt not eat
of it; for in the day thou eatest
thereof thou shalt surely die.|

The narrative in this part unfolds itself consistently in the two accounts. They are alike in that a prohibitory command is given, disobedience to which will entail death to man. They are different in that one centers the command around the tree of life, the other around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

TEMPTATION AND FALL.

‡ And the serpent SAID unto the
 a, † woman, | Behold | ye shall not
 † die | and Jehovah God hath
 spoken lest man put forth his
 hand and take also of the tree
 of life and eat and live for-
 ever and become as one of us
 to know good and evil. |
 † And she SAW that the tree
 was good for food. Then
 she took of the fruit there-
 of AND GAVE ALSO UNTO
 † HER HUSBAND. | And the eyes
 of them were opened and they
 knew they were naked. And
 they sewed fig leaves together
 and made themselves aprons. |

‡ Now the serpent was wise
 above the beast of the field
 which Jehovah God had made.
 And he said unto the woman;
 Yea, hath God said, Ye shall
 not eat of every tree of the
 † garden? | And the woman said
 unto the serpent, We may eat
 of the fruit of the trees of the
 † garden, | but of the fruit of the
 tree which is in the midst of
 the garden God hath said, Ye
 † shall not touch it. | AND HE
 † SAID, | Because God doth know
 that in the day ye eat thereof,
 then your eyes shall be opened
 and ye shall be as gods know-
 † ing good and evil. | And when
 the woman SAW that it was
 a delight to the eye and a tree
 to be desired to make one wise,
 she eat AND GAVE UNTO HER
 HUSBAND and he eat with her. |

The narrative of J assumes that the nature of the serpent is known, that he is an intelligent being. The writer of E is particular to describe the serpent, and makes it most clear that he is a very different being than the beast of the field. He is wiser. Each narrative makes the serpent the beguiler of the woman. Each makes the eating of the tree to be followed by the knowledge of good and evil. The teaching of the two narratives is the same; their literary styles differ.

THE PUNISHMENT OF DISOBEDIENCE.

1. **AND ADAM AND HIS WIFE** heard the voice of Jehovah
 God **AND THEY HID THEM-**
 2. **SILVES** among the trees of
 3. **THE** garden. | **And Jehovah**
 4. **God** called to Adam. | **AND**
 5. **HE SAID,** I heard thy voice
 6. in the garden and I was
 7. afraid: | **AND HE SAID,** Hast
 8. thou eaten of the tree where-
 9. of I commanded thee: that
 10. thou shouldest not eat of it? |
 11. **AND he SAID, THE WOMAN**
 12. **GAVE ME** of the tree and I
 13. ate. | **AND THE WOMAN**
 14. **SAID:** THE SERPENT BE-
 15. **GUILED ME.** | **AND JEHOVAH**
 16. **GOD SAID UNTO THE SER-**
 17. **PENT,** | I WILL PUT ENMITY
 18. BETWEEN THEE AND THE
 19. WOMAN, and she shall sure-
 20. ly crush thy head. | **AND**
 21. **UNTO THE WOMAN HE SAID,**
 22. In sorrow thou shalt bring
 23. forth children, and | the man |
 24. shall rule over thee. | **AND**
 25. **UNTO THE MAN HE SAID,**
 26. Because thou hast hearkened
 27. unto the voice of thy wife,
 28. cursed is the ground for thy
 29. sake. | Thorns also and thistles
 30. shall it bring forth to
 31. thee. | **And thou shalt eat**
 32. bread | of the dust all the
 33. days of thy life, | till thou
 34. return unto the ground; for
 35. out of it wast thou taken. |
 36. **And Jehovah God sent him**
 37. forth from the garden of
 38. Eden to till the ground
 39. whence he was taken. | **And**
 40. he placed cherubim TO
 41. GUARD THE WAY.

1. **And Jehovah God walked in the**
 2. garden in the cool of the day
 3. **And ADAM AND HIS WIFE HID**
 4. **THEMSELVES.** | **And he said un-**
 5. **to him, Where art thou?** | **AND**
 6. **HE SAID:** I hid myself because I
 7. was naked. | **AND HE SAID,** Who
 8. told thee that thou wast naked? |
 9. **And hast thou eaten of the tree**
 10. **of which I commanded thee, say-**
 11. **ing, Thou shalt not eat of it?** |
 12. **AND HE SAID:** She whom thou
 13. gavest to be with me **GAVE ME** |
 14. **and I eat.** **And he said unto**
 15. **the woman, Why hast thou done**
 16. **this? AND SHE SAID, THE SER-**
 17. **PENT BEGUILED ME.** | **AND JE-**
 18. **HOVAH GOD SAID UNTO THE**
 19. **SERPENT,** | I WILL PUT ENMITY
 20. BETWEEN THEE AND THE WO-
 21. MAN, and between thy seed and
 22. her seed, and it shall ever crush
 23. thee. | **AND UNTO THE WOMAN**
 24. **HE SAID,** I will exceedingly mul-
 25. tiply thy sorrowing and thy con-
 26. ception. And thy desire shall
 27. be unto thy husband. | **AND UN-**
 28. **TO THE MAN HE SAID,** | Because
 29. thou hast done this, cursed art
 30. thou above the cattle and the
 31. beast of the field. | **Thou shalt**
 32. **eat in the sweat of thy face,**
 33. when thou eatest the herb of
 34. the field; | in sorrow shalt thou
 35. eat it all the days of thy life |
 36. and thou shalt return unto the
 37. dust; for dust thou art. | **And he**
 38. **drove man out from the garden**
 39. **of Eden. And there was a flati-**
 40. **ng sword turning every way**
 41. **TO GUARD THE WAY.**

The word in the Authorized Version translated "heel" is in our restoration rendered "ever." The expression "upon thy belly thou shalt go" is rejected as belonging elsewhere. The common matter is due to the dialogue-feature which appears in the latter part of the Eden-story. The narratives as restored are congruous in all their parts; and each is characterized by its own peculiar mode of expressions and literary style. Yet in both, although it is differently reached, the penalty of disobedience is the knowledge of good and evil and Jehovah's disapprobation. The proto-evangelium, as it has been happily called, is consistent. The common idea in each is the enmity between mankind and the evil one. It is the woman as representative of her race who, according to J, shall crush the head of the serpent, while in E it is the seed of the woman that shall ever crush him. No curse is placed upon the serpent in the restored narratives. The curse in J is upon the ground; in E the curse is upon Adam as compared to the cattle and the beast of the field. The curse in each narrative is simply that man shall toil during life and at last return to dust. The banishment from Eden is found in each narrative; but in J cherubim guard the way back, while in E this way is made impassable by the flame of a sword which turns round about. The Hebrew scholar should reconstruct the Hebrew text and observe the charm in each narrative and see how each writer has peculiar words as well as a characteristic and idiomatic style.

Higher critics have unanimously assigned the subject-matter taken from Genesis and treated in this article to the J-document. Yet Budde suggests that the original Eden-story had but one tree in the midst of the garden, the tree of life, and that the second tree was incorporated by a later hand. These critics have also pointed out, with reference to verses 22-24, that "the statement in verse 24, 'and he

drove out the man' appears superfluous after the expulsion of verse 23, 'and Yahweh sent him forth,' and reads like a doublet from another source." Higher criticism has left the subject in a very unsatisfactory state. Reconstructive criticism accepts the incongruities which have been pointed out, multiplies them many fold, and restores two narratives from the same subject-matter in Genesis, and these narratives are substantially alike in thought, varied in language and style, and possess none of those difficulties which have ever perplexed interpreters. One conclusion is evident, at any rate, from this investigation, namely, that the grounds upon which higher criticism rests its hypothesis are the same upon which another hypothesis may rest, giving more acceptable conclusions.