

## ARTICLE VI.

## THE BABEL-BIBLE CONTROVERSY.

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AMONG the epoch-making achievements of scientific research during the past century which possess a lasting character, the results of the explorations carried on in the countries of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers stand forth preëminently. Although excavations had been carried on systematically in Mesopotamia since 1842, the interest of the educated Christian world was more generally aroused in France in 1846 at the return of Paul Emil Botta from his successful expedition to Assyria. In England the interest of the public reached a climax when George Smith, in October, 1872, discovered, among the clay tablets of Assurbanipal's library at Nineveh, an account of the Deluge, which he made public on December 3, 1872, to a representative audience over which Gladstone presided. A similar wave of enthusiasm swept over at least the Eastern States of this country, when the magnificent results of the various expeditions sent out by the University of Pennsylvania to Nippur in Babylonia, under Peters, Haynes, and Hilprecht, were made known. Again a climax was reached when, in the autumn of 1902, Professor Hilprecht, in a course of public lectures to large audiences, reviewed the remarkable finds made at Nippur. What a deep and permanent interest was created may be seen by the fact that, within the past twenty-five years, courses in Assyriology have been established in all the leading universities of this country.

Museums, books, periodicals, and popular lectures were the means whereby such information was disseminated throughout the land; and at two universities, Pennsylvania and Yale, special chairs in Assyrian have been munificently endowed by such public-spirited men as the Clark brothers of Philadelphia and J. P. Morgan of New York.

The country most recently touched by the magic spell of the ancient Orient is Germany. Although a German scholar, Grotefend, first succeeded in finding a key for the decipherment of the long-forgotten cuneiform script, and although German scholars have ever since held a leading rank in Assyriology; yet the messages told by the ancient monuments of Babylon and Assur did not begin to interest the German people of all classes of society until recently, when Professor Friedrich Delitzsch of Berlin delivered, in the presence of the German Emperor and of a select audience, a series of lectures on "Babel and Bible," which at once resulted in placing the subject before the forum of public discussion, and caused it to be discussed, in all its phases and bearings, by all classes of German society. A considerable Babel-Bible library in German has appeared in consequence.

Naturally the question arises, Why is it that within the last fifty years the leading nations of the world have in turn shown such enthusiastic attention to ancient Assyria and Babylonia? The catchy cue "Babel-Bible" tells us. It was because Assyria and Babylonia, their history and civilization, were so closely related to that of Israel as told in the Bible. True enough the rediscovery of countries that once ruled the world and were then buried and forgotten for centuries; the remarkable stories of the monuments dug out of the desert sand hills, telling of man's achievements in the dawn of human history, and filling gap after gap on the early pages of the world's

history which until then were a blank; together with the romantic accounts of the difficulties encountered by the pioneers of Oriental research in the swamps and deserts of Asia or in their private study-room at home — all these circumstances alone were sufficient to fascinate the attention of the whole cultured world.

Over and above this, however, the Christian world, and especially the readers of the Bible, viewed with warmth this ancient civilization arising out of the darkness of a several-thousand-years-old grave, because of its unexpected wealth of illustrations, corrections, and explanations for understanding the Old Testament. In these ancient monuments they saw a magnificent apology of the historical fidelity of the Old Testament and a powerful witness for the uniqueness of Israel's religious development. They were strengthened in this belief by the popular writings of such men as Sayce, Hommel, and Hilprecht.

Within very recent years, however, negative Bible critics have attempted to use the results of Assyriological research in their attacks upon the Bible. Professor Delitzsch, in his above-named "Babel and Bible" lectures, crystallized this movement, and made it appear as if the Bible in the light of the Assyrian monuments was proved to be nothing but man's work, not divine revelation. Followers of Delitzsch in Europe and America have heralded this view broadcast, and did as if their new message was the result of exact scientific research. Delitzsch attempted to prove mainly three things: (1) that much of the contents of the Old Testament is evidently borrowed from the Babylonians, and therefore not revealed by God; (2) that the ethical level of Israel was in many points below that of the Babylonians, and that the Jewish laws cannot be of divine origin; (3) that the Bible narrates things

which have been proved to be incorrect by Assyriological research.

How untenable and baseless these theories are may best be seen by an impartial consideration of the more important results of the excavations themselves, in so far as they have any bearing on the Old Testament. The fruitful stimulus which the study of the Scriptures has received from the interpretation of the cuneiform inscriptions has already evidenced itself in various ways. An ever-increasing light was thus thrown on Semitic philology, lexicography, and grammar. The importance of a comparative study of the Assyrian and the Hebrew will appeal to us at once, if we remember that they are cognate languages, and that each developed a literature under similar conditions of commerce at about the same time. Several dozen well-known words occur in the Hebrew and the Assyrian only, and have but recently been understood in their true meaning. A good many conjectures regarding the Old Testament text have thus become needless. Numerous names of persons and places as well as titles can now be satisfactorily explained only with the help of the Assyrian. Our knowledge of biblical geography has also been greatly enriched, and numerous biblical places which heretofore could not be localized have now been fully identified. Mount Ararat, Ur of the Chaldees, Haran, Karchemish, Pethor, Cuta, Kebar, are but a few such examples; and, to mention but one more instance out of many, the historicity of the table of nations (Gen. x.), which was so frequently attacked and doubted, has been gloriously vindicated. In this connection it may be worth while to call attention to the fact that many biblical localities have not as yet been as definitely located as the average school map would have us believe. As the thousands of hitherto undeciphered inscriptions are gradually being interpreted by

our diligent modern scholars, the earliest periods of human history are more and more brought to light out of a long-forgotten past. One need but take a modern edition of a text-book on ancient history, such as are now used in our high schools and colleges, and compare the first few pages that give in brief form our present knowledge of the earliest history of the world with similar books used in our schools a generation ago, and the wonderful progress in exact historical knowledge will readily become evident.

These are but a few examples, out of many, which go to show how potently Assyriological research has fructified various fields of science more or less closely related to Old Testament study. Of the greatest general interest and importance, however, certain cuneiform records proved to be, which in a hitherto unequalled way contained accounts strikingly parallel to the well-known biblical stories of Creation, Paradise, the Flood, and the Primeval Fathers. These, according to Delitzsch, the Old Testament writers took over from Assyrian and Babylonian sources. And, furthermore, the Hebrew Sabbath and the monotheism of the Jews, that were until recently looked upon as an exclusively Jewish possession, are now said to have existed in Babylonia long before Moses' time. Is this true? Is it possible to refute these statements? Does not the hitherto prevailing view of divine revelation crumble together in view of these alleged modern scientific discoveries?

At the outset we must clearly keep in mind the fact that locally as well as temporally the beginning chapters of Genesis point to Babylonia. The localizing of the rivers of Paradise, the Flood account, the story of Nimrod's Empire, the narrative about the ten Primeval Fathers, the story about the Tower of Babel,—all these are, on the whole, not exclusively

Israelitish property, but a common heritage of various ancient people, as the comparative study of religion has clearly shown. And if we find such parallel traditions amongst the early inhabitants of America and Europe, as well as of Africa and Asia, is it not quite natural that in the recollections of their earliest history the Assyro-Babylonians and the Hebrews, two Semitic people so closely related as regards their language as well as their racial type, should have retained a closely similar tradition? Still more so when we consider that Israel traced its origin back to southern Babylonia, the home of the patriarch Abraham. And if we finally remember that throughout its history the recollection of Babylonia as being the former home of its progenitors never was forgotten, then it becomes evident that common origin and related character sufficiently account in most instances for common parallel literary possessions. Similar traditions from early times, similar linguistic phraseology, identical or similar conceptions and customs, are exactly what we expect to find. It was in no wise necessary for Hebrew writers first to study Assyrian literature, in order to transmit Assyrian possessions to their own people. In fact, it is altogether unlikely, because the Jews were always, as a people, fundamentally separated from their Semitic relatives. The Jewish people went its own way, and its religious development took an entirely different course from that of other nations. And right here it must be pointed out that not those points which Israel had in common with other nations (for instance, with the Assyro-Babylonians), but rather the fundamental, incisive differences, must be considered, if we wish to test the intrinsic value of Israel's religion.

The Babylonians possessed a creation epic which possesses various points of resemblance with the biblical account of creation; but, nevertheless, closer comparison will show that both

accounts differ fundamentally from each other in most and at that just the essential points. Over against the simple and chaste account of Genesis, bearing on its face the stamp of truthfulness, and leading back the origin of the universe to the one almighty God, we see the fantastic, bizarre, confused, and unreal Babylonian account, with its crude, materialistic polytheism, where the gods themselves are created, and appear quarreling, fighting amongst themselves, full of fear, intoxicated, and winning success by witchcraft. The Babylonian account of creation resembles, indeed, rather Hesiod's "Theogony." In the Babylonian epic we find a creation out of already existing matter, and the world arises as the result of a fight of the gods with nature. The Babylonian story is bound down to the locality where the tradition developed, and puts native anthropomorphic elements into the creating activity of the gods. Everything aims at the enthronisation of a new world-god — Marduk.

These are incisive differences from the biblical narrative. It is utterly absurd to maintain with Delitzsch, that a whole series of biblical narratives appears in a purer and more original form in the Babylonian creation story. As regards the occurrence of certain related expressions both in the Hebrew and in the Assyrian accounts, it does in no wise follow that the taking over of these words and of mythical pictures from another religion proves or presupposes an acceptance of these myths; just as the fact that we speak of Hallowe'en does not postulate our belief in the "spooks," etc., formerly associated with that night.

Several ancient peoples possessed traditions of a great flood. Such a catastrophe naturally would impress itself indelibly upon the memory of the survivors and their descendants, and certain characteristic features would surely survive throughout

the ages. The Babylonian Flood story in many points resembles the biblical account. There are, however, also various essential differences. The Babylonian account has a multitude of gods, who are exceedingly capricious, and disagree amongst themselves, lie, cheat one another, fear the very elements which they themselves set loose, are attracted in their eager greed by the sweet savor of the burnt-offering, like flies, before they themselves even know who is bringing the offering. The Babylonian account does not state why the gods sent a flood. Essential facts of the Hebrew account are missing in the Assyrian; for instance, the olive twig of the dove, and the rainbow. On the other hand, the Bible does not speak of a pilot nor of a crew of workmen taken along in the ark. The biblical account appears to be a strictly historical narrative, while the Babylonian story gives patent evidence of containing fabulous elements. Usually fables originate from historical narratives by a process of corruption, and not *vice versa*. The spirit of the two traditions differs fundamentally one from the other. The Babylonian hero rescues his dead and living property. The biblical account, instead, possesses the higher viewpoint of the preservation of animal life.

Delitzsch tried to connect an illustration on an old Babylonian seal cylinder with the biblical story of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. The picture represents a man and a woman, garbed in long, flowing gowns, sitting on chairs to the right and left of a tree, towards which both stretch out an arm. Behind the female figure something that may represent a snake is suspended perpendicularly in the air. Since no autochthonal parallel account with Gen. iii. 1 ff. has been found as yet in cuneiform literature, and since nowhere in the Babylonian-Assyrian creation story mention is made of an original pair,



man and wife, several noted Assyriologists have denied that this cylinder has anything to do with a paradise story, not to mention numerous essential differences from the account in Gen. iii., where the snake communicates with the woman alone, and where no mention is made of beautiful chairs and garments or headdress, such as are pictured on the cylinder. The engraving on the seal cylinder is, at any rate, far removed from the Genesis account, and it is absurd to intimate even that it points to a Babylonian origin of the biblical story of man's fall, as long as no related cuneiform text is found. It is worth noticing that nowhere in Babylonian mythology have we a parallel to the biblical story of the fall, the decisive happening in Paradise.

Delitzsch also called attention to the fact that the ten biblical primitive fathers (Gen. v.) very likely corresponded to the Babylonian primeval kings mentioned by Berosus. But he failed to mention that the Israelite tradition distinguishes two such series of primeval fathers, one being a genealogy of the Sethites, or good forefathers, the other of the Cainites (Gen. iv.), or relatively bad forefathers. While certain striking relations no doubt exist between the biblical and the Babylonian series of names, nevertheless there are also such important differences that it is impossible to accept the biblical series as the mere precipitation of a mythologically colored Babylonian tradition. The Babylonian list possesses an out-and-out national coloring, the respective persons being Babylonian kings, who, according to Berosus, reigned 432,000 years. On the other hand, various features of the biblical account speak strongly in favor of its historical character.

According to Delitzsch, the Jewish Sabbath also originated in Babylonia and Assyria. There we find not only the name *shabattu*, but also a hemerology, the so-called "Sabbath law,"

an inscription which states that the 7th, 15th, 19th, 21st, and 28th days of the months Elul and Arahshaman are evil days, on which certain things shall not be done. Yet here again various important facts were not mentioned by Delitzsch. In Israel the Sabbath is a day of God's rest from work. It was instituted for the purpose of practising humane deeds towards servants and beasts. The above-mentioned Babylonian days are explicitly called evil days, while the Hebrew Sabbath was a specially blessed day. Nowhere are we told what day was called the *shabattu* in Babylonia, whether it was an annual festival or one of the aforementioned days. The Jewish Sabbath fell on every 7th day, and did not vary as the days mentioned in the Sabbath law. The Babylonian *shabattu* was, furthermore, a day of atonement, and not a day of rest from work. And, finally, it must not be overlooked that in Isa. lvi. 3 ff., the observance of the Sabbath is specified as a distinguishing feature between Jews and proselytes over against the Babylonians.

Repeatedly attempts have been made to trace the origin of Jewish monotheism to other ancient peoples. Egypt, Phœnicia, Arabia, were said to be its home. Now Delitzsch tries to derive it from Babylonia. At least Canaanites, or northern Semites, who immigrated into that country about 2500 B. C., are said to have been monotheists. Besides, Delitzsch maintains that the Semitic name for "god" is a word that precludes a multitude of gods; and finally, the different gods are said to have been but different names and phases of the one Godhead to the more enlightened Assyrians. Various scholars have refuted these assertions, for the cuneiform texts dating from the time of these Canaanite immigrants show us that polytheism was rampant then. Hammurabi, for instance, the mightiest ruler of that time, enumerates a whole list of gods

in the prologue of his famous code of laws, and in the proper names of that period theophorous names abound, which indicate that even the more intelligent and enlightened minds were polytheists. The name of Hammurabi's father was Sinmuballit, i.e. "the moon-god gives life," and his son's name was "Samsu-iluna," i.e. "the sun is our god."

Delitzsch's assertion that the Semitic word for "god," *el*, *ilu*, signified "aim," "goal," and indicated a monotheistic conception of God amongst the Canaanites, is equally baseless. Professor Edward König's view appeals much more and is supported by several proof-texts, viz. that *el* signifies "might," "power" (cf. Gen. xxxi. 29, etc.). Finally, it must be pointed out that the inscription which, according to Delitzsch, identifies the various gods: god Ninib, Marduk of strength; god Nergal, Marduk of battle, etc., permits of various interpretations, all of which are just as appealing and some even more probable than that offered by Delitzsch.

In short, this attempt to explain the origin of Hebrew monotheism in a natural way, i.e. to deny its supernatural element, has proved to be a dismal failure, and the fact again remains that no science is able to explain the unique religious development of the Jews, their monotheism, in the midst of surrounding polytheists.

In comparing the religion and the laws of the Israelites with those of the Assyrians, Delitzsch comes to the conclusion that the ethical *niveau* of the Jews was lower than that of the Assyrians. Blood-feud, warfare, and the position of woman among the Jews are said to give evidence of this. But Delitzsch makes himself guilty of an entirely one-sided, colored, and incorrect presentation, which distorts and in no way corresponds to the facts as they appear to an unprejudiced, objective reader of the Old Testament. For, as a matter of

fact, that blood-feud which rests as a curse upon certain Oriental nations is not sanctioned in the Bible. The punishment of a murderer by the near relatives of the murdered person was undoubtedly permitted because of the hard-heartedness of the people, as was the case with other things, but it was controlled and checked by law, so that the name "blood-feud" does not fit the circumstances at all. The shedding of human blood was forbidden (Gen. ix. 6; Num. xxxvi. 33, etc.). Arbitrary and personal revenge were likewise forbidden by legal restrictions. Only one person, the *goel*, i.e. the representative of the rights of the murdered person, was permitted to carry out this right of punishment. At least two witnesses were necessary for conviction, and this necessitated a regular previous investigation. Besides there were six places of refuge for the accused to flee to; and if he was found to be not guilty, he was permitted to live unharmed in one of these cities, and might return free to his home when the high priest died.

It is natural to expect that Babylonia, having a much older government and culture, was in some points in advance of the Jews of the Mosaic period in this matter; but to maintain that the Jews were ethically inferior contradicts all historical facts.

Delitzsch is but repeating what others have done before him, if he claims that the Jews practised savage cruelties in warfare. In this case, however, he would better not have compared them to the Assyrians, for it is a comparatively simple matter to adduce examples from the inscriptions of Assyrian and Babylonian kings, which give abundant evidence of revoltingly cruel and inhuman practices of those Oriental despots toward men and animals, as well as toward inanimate nature, such as trees. Not only that captives were burned by thousands, including children, others being put to death by hunger and thirst, and still others having hands and arms, or

noses and ears, cut off, eyes plucked out, tongues torn out, and lips cut off — but Asurnasirpal and others boast of having cut off and destroyed their enemies' forests and gardens. Over against these acts of vandalism, Deut. xx. 19 ff. must be called to mind, where it is explicitly stated that fruitbearing trees must be spared, and 1 Kings xx. 31, where we are told that Israelite kings had the reputation of being humane and loyal towards their enemies. Besides, it must be remembered that the moral elevation of a nation can be gauged only indirectly by events that happen during such stirring periods as times of war. And although the Hebrews repeatedly followed up their victories in a merciless manner, it must not be forgotten that this was done toward nations like the Canaanites, whose utter depravity called forth God's judgment upon their heads as a punishment for their heathenish wickedness (Gen. xix. 5; Lev. xviii. 38; Eccles. xii. 4, etc.); as well as to safeguard Israel against being seduced by them. Secondly, this happened over against such enemies as the Amalekites, who had treacherously assaulted Israel (1 Sam. xv. 26), or like the people of Succoth (Judges viii. 6), who had denied sustenance and aid to passing troops. Thirdly, the correct reading of 2 Sam. xii. 31 is: "and he let the captives work with the brick-mould." Fourthly, in 2 Chron. xxv. 12 it is said that enemies were cast down from a rock in revenge, but Amos i. 11 explains this by saying that Edom had frequently shown cruelty against its brother Israel.

Over and against the alleged low position of woman amongst the Hebrews, as maintained by Delitzsch, we need but call attention to the honorable way in which women are repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament, the eminent position held by Moses' sister, Mary, Deborah, Huldah — and to the praise bestowed upon a good wife; to the many legal regulations con-

cerning women; and, finally, to the Decalogue, which demands obedience toward father and mother.

On the other hand, from Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions as well as from Herodotus, we know that in Babylonia prostitution was a religious act, a sort of worship, carried on in honor of the Babylonian goddess Istar. Hammurabi in his code speaks of prostitution in a most unconcerned manner, as of a self-evident institution.

In summing up, it must be said that only by the concealing, exaggerating, and one-sidedly misstating of facts can one arrive at the conclusion that Israelite culture was ethically inferior to that of the Babylonians.

Delitzsch also maintained that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, contained untruthful statements, and in proof of his assertions produces anew some of the old, time-worn arguments of negative Bible critics. To believe even to-day that Jonah in the belly of the fish prayed a mosaic of psalm passages that were partly composed centuries after Nineveh's fall, or that the king of Nineveh did such sincere penitence that he ordered oxen and sheep to be clothed with sackcloth, would be a sin against our common sense. The entire book of Jonah, Delitzsch deems fantastically Oriental.

With reference to the date and origin of Jonah's psalm, a late date is by no means ascribed to it by all scholars. It is simply a conjecture of some negative, radical critics. And ascribing to it an eclectic and composite character signifies a total disregard, undervaluing, and misconception of the beauty and homogeneity of the psalm, that corresponds so well to the condition in which the prophet found himself. A public religious fasting on a large scale was nothing unusual in Assyria, and from cuneiform literature we know of such a fasting that was decreed by Asarhaddon. Above all things the

historicity of the book of Jonah is vouchsafed for by the testimony of Christ himself (Matt. xii. 39).

Delitzsch considers it shallow witticism and scoffing, which should be branded accordingly, when the Old Testament prophets ridicule the Babylonian idols, "who have eyes and see not, ears and hear not," etc., because the enlightened class amongst the Babylonians and Assyrians saw in the idols but emblems of the gods enthroned in heaven. And yet, it seems to us, the Old Testament prophets, who formed their judgment on the basis of what they themselves saw and heard concerning the worship of their idolatrous contemporaries, knew right well the import of their own sayings, and would have most carefully avoided exposing themselves. And besides, if we compare the religious inscriptions of the Assyrians, teeming with the grossest idolatry, with the Old Testament, the full baselessness of Delitzsch's statement readily becomes evident.

Delitzsch deems it a going astray of man's reason to believe in the revelation of the Bible. In proof of this he says that the book of Job, for instance, denies the existence of a just God with words that partly border on blasphemy; while the Song of Solomon, according to him, consists of wedding songs of a very worldly nature. Furthermore, Delitzsch claims that, according to the Bible, God positively instituted the idolatry of the heathens, and nevertheless later punished them for it.

It would lead us too far, if we would attempt to point out in detail the shocking levity and superficiality of these as well as other similar incorrect and one-sided statements of Delitzsch concerning the Bible. Scarcely one of these alleged new difficulties put forward by Delitzsch but has been disproved or explained to the satisfaction of Bible lovers long ago.

In the book of Job the problem of the suffering of the righteous is treated — its source and its purpose. In the various dialogues the different speakers frequently utter incorrect views, but are always corrected by the others or by the author. Especially Job himself, in his extreme physical and mental anguish, utters words which, if torn from the others and dissected without regard to the context, may sound like bordering on blasphemy and like denying the existence of a just God. But, and this is to be kept in mind, the author does by no means accept them as his own view, nor does he concur in them. Job meets objection and censure. In chapter vi. 3 he says: "My words are foolish"; and thereby takes away the sting from his own words. Furthermore, the dialogues end by God setting Job aright, who finally says: "I retreat, and do penitence," etc.

The view which Delitzsch, in common with modern negative critics, takes of the Song of Solomon must also not pass by unchallenged. Conservative Bible scholars of all times have considered it to be an allegorical account of the mystic union of Christ and his church. This latter view enables one to fully appreciate the entire Song, because it is evidently the dominant idea of the author. It is also a common view of the Old Testament to picture God's relation to the Old Testament covenant as a marriage relation, and the Jew's apostasy as adultery. From this point of view the individual, perhaps sometimes rather crude, strokes of the brush, will disappear and enable one to appreciate the Song as a work of art.

In concluding, it cannot be too emphatically emphasized that the recent attempt to strip Israel of its idiomatic and religious characteristics, and the endeavor to trace them back and ultimately derive them from Babel, has proved an utter failure. A process of religious evolution from Babel to Bible,



Delitzsch's theory regarding the origin of Old Testament institutions and theology, has certainly not as yet been established with convincing evidence.

The magnificent results of Assyriological research and their bearings on the Old Testament shall in no wise be belittled, and yet a warning is not amiss against giving credence to the unproved theories and conjectures of Delitzsch and others, who spread them in popular form amongst the public.

We rejoice that, as a result of the newly-opened-up knowledge concerning the ancient Orient, the Old Testament has unexpectedly received a living background. It has been rescued from its hitherto isolation. As a result of this, the unique singularity of Israel's spiritual and religious development, as the people of salvation and bearer of divine revelation, is correctly bounded, and the growing conviction impresses itself upon the unprejudiced observer that Israel, in its specifically religious development, pursued its own ways, led on by its God, who revealed himself to it alone, "making known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel."

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