

THE BIBLICAL PROCESS

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Genesis is a book of beginnings in more ways than one. It starts out with an account of the origin of the world, hence the name, introduced in the third century B.C. by the Greek translators to whom we owe the so-called Septuagint (or LXX) version. Then, too, Genesis is the initial portion in the first of the three major subdivisions of the Old Testament, and hence the first book of the Bible. But Genesis also marks a beginning from within as well as from without. It is not only the starting point of a long series; beyond and above that, Genesis is our main clue to the process which ultimately produced the Bible, as a witness to one of the profoundest experiences of mankind. The Book of Genesis is thus, among other things, the key to the genesis of the Bible as a whole.

In the Hebrew, Genesis bears the (normalized) title of *Bereshit*. By sheer coincidence, this name, too, applies to beginnings. The first word in the original happens to be *b'rēšit*; and it was standard practice in the ancient Near East to call a literary work by its initial word or phrase. For this reason, for example, the Hebrew name for the third book of the Bible is *Wayyiqra*, although all it means is "and he called"; the more pertinent term Leviticus has been adapted from the Greek version. Similarly, the Babylonians called their own Genesis, or Poem of Creation, *Enūma eliš* "when on high," and the Epic of Gilgamesh *Ša nagba imuru* "he who experienced all." It was mere chance that placed the word *b'rēšit* "in the beginning (of)" at the head of the Hebrew Bible. As it turned out, it is indeed an appropriate opening for the Scriptures as a unit.

When it comes, however, to the collective section which the Book of Genesis heads, it is the secondary term *Pentateuch*, from the Greek for "five-volume (work)," that deals with an external detail,

whereas the Hebrew title *Torah* addresses itself to the content. Yet for all its basic merit, the latter designation was to be, paradoxically enough, a hindrance rather than a help. For one thing, this name (technically *tōrā*) is invariably translated "Law," thus giving the impression that the work is devoted in the main to legal questions. And for another thing—and far more important—the title *Torah* was to lead very early to a mistaken notion about the authorship of the first five books of the Bible. The matter is of sufficient consequence to warrant a brief statement about some of the details involved.

It goes without saying that the Pentateuch does not confine itself to laws either in the secular or in the ritual sense of the term. The outstanding feature of this part of the Bible is its narrative content, and it is surely to its narrative material that the Pentateuch owes its universal appeal. The mechanical equation of *Torah* with law does little justice to the work as a whole; nor is it an accurate rendering of the name itself.

What is fundamental, however, is the fact that nowhere does the Pentateuch speak of itself as the *Torah*. To be sure, the noun is often used throughout the work; but it has numerous connotations, none of which can be mistaken in the context for the title of the work as a whole. The nominal form *tōrā* is based on a verbal stem signifying "to teach, guide," and the like; cf. Exod xxiv 12 "and the *Torah* and the Instruction which I have written for their guidance." The derived noun can carry a variety of meanings, which range in the Pentateuch from specific rituals for so-called leprosy (Lev xiii 59; xiv 2, 54, 57) to general precepts and sayings (as in the Exod passage just cited). In Deut xxxi 26 *tōrā* refers to the long hortatory poem that follows. And when the same term is applied to the Deity, its connotation is broadened to embrace a cherished way of life (Exod xiii 9). Thus the stereotyped rendering "law" can be justified neither as an exclusive juridical term nor as a distinctive literary title.

There are occasions when the Pentateuch speaks explicitly of a written *tōrā*. Yet this usage does not of itself narrow down the meaning of the word; each occurrence has to be judged from its own context. In Exod xxiv 12, for example, the document in question turns out to be the Covenant Code (xxi–xxiii), which was inscribed on two stone tablets (cf. Exod xxxiv 1) and was thus automatically restricted in length. In Deut xxix 20, on the other hand,

the writing concerned specified sanctions in an entirely different covenant; and Deut xvii 18 and xxx 10 allude only to general instructions and provisions. The only Pentateuchal passage that refers comprehensively to a written *tōrā* is Deut xxxi 9, where we are told that "Moses wrote down this *tōrā*." This particular statement points either to the portions of Deuteronomy that precede, as most moderns assume, or to the poetic sections which follow, as some scholars believe. In neither event could the Pentateuch as a whole be at issue. Yet it is this one ambiguous reference, more than anything else, that eventually gave rise to the doctrine of the Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch.

It is not too hazardous to trace back the steps whereby such a belief attained the status of an article of faith. The Pentateuch was the first portion of the Old Testament to be accepted as sacred and canonical. This meant that the work was ultimately attributed to God and emerged thus as a body of teachings comprising the one *Torah* above all others. Thus it was this particular connotation of the term that would occur most readily to the reverent mind. In these circumstances, there could be but one answer to the question as to what it was that Deut xxxi 9 records as having been written by Moses: the *Torah* proper, of course, that is, the Pentateuch.

The devout students of the Bible who first perpetrated this semantic anachronism—in all innocence—could scarcely have anticipated the ironic consequences of their interpretation. So far from enhancing the status of the *Torah*, the axiom that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch has often tended to lower the work in the opinion of independent investigators. For objective inquiry must soon turn up various flaws in a Pentateuch that is attributed to a single author, whereas no such defects would be found in the composite product of various writers. The five books as we now have them contain many instances of duplication, inconsistencies, and mutual contradictions, aside from manifest stylistic disparities. In a collective work, however, all such irregularities become self-explanatory, once they are viewed as the natural result of various traditions and different individual styles and approaches. Nor does uncommitted analysis undermine the credibility of the Bible, as has often been feared and alleged. The ensuing pages should make it abundantly clear that in Genesis in particular, and in other biblical books by extension, independent study helps to increase one's respect

for the received material beyond the fondest expectations of the confirmed traditionalists.

To sum up, Torah is not strictly law, and there is no warrant in the Pentateuch itself—as opposed to sundry echoes in later books of the Bible—for ascribing the authorship of the work as a whole to Moses. Modern biblical criticism has established this last point on the strength of massive internal evidence. The grounds on which that conclusion was arrived at will now be sketched in barest outline, before we probe further into the Book of Genesis for clues to biblical origins.

BIBLICAL CRITICISM

The first signs of a critical approach to the Old Testament reach back as far as the second century of the present era.¹ In the Middle Ages, the distinguished Jewish commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra (twelfth century) managed to suggest his acute awareness of the problems implicit in the assumption of the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. Although he couched his hints on the subject in guarded language, Ibn Ezra was able, nevertheless, to intimate to his readers that certain passages in the Pentateuch must be post-Mosaic, and that the statement in Deut xxxi 9 cannot be construed in the traditional manner.²

It required, however, the penetrating probing of Spinoza (seventeenth century) to launch "higher" biblical criticism—that is, internal analysis as opposed to textual or "lower" criticism—on a truly productive course. Steady subsequent progress left little doubt that instead of being the work of Moses in its entirety, the Pentateuch was actually the product of a number of writers. In time, the critics were able to draw a sharp line between Deuteronomy (*D*), on the one hand, and the four preceding books—or the Tetratauch—on the other. Within the Tetratauch, a cleavage soon became apparent between the so-called Priestly source (*P*) and the outright narrative material; and the narratives, in turn, eventually

¹ See R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1941, p. 43.

² Cf. I. Husik, *JAOS* 55 (1935), Suppl., 31 f.

yielded two main strands which came to be designated as *J* (Yahwist) and *E* (Elohist).

To state the findings in this summary fashion is to give only such end results as have won qualified acceptance from the great majority of biblical scholars. Actually, the course of Pentateuchal criticism has been exceedingly tortuous, and an immense amount of effort and ingenuity has been invested in the process over a period of some two hundred years. The fact is that the Pentateuch, with a long history of growth, compilation, and transmission behind it, cannot be dissected at this late date with the confident assurance that all its original components have been duly isolated and identified. We are as yet a long way from being able to attribute every passage to its ultimate source. The critics of the nineteenth century may have felt that they had all the answers that really mattered. But fresh discoveries and more refined tools of analysis have made twentieth-century students at once more sophisticated and less sanguine. This is perhaps one reason why some scholars would today substitute for the "documentary" solution with its emphasis on individual authors, the so-called "form" hypothesis, which lays stress on literary categories rooted in separate oral traditions. Nor have attempts been lacking to experiment with still other modes of approach.

The all-important point, at any rate, the conclusion which virtually all modern scholars are willing to accept, is that the Pentateuch was in reality a composite work, the product of many hands and periods. This is the fundamental fact behind all recent progress in biblical study, as it has opened the way to a solution of many difficulties that would otherwise remain unresolved. The result is a working hypothesis which should be judged solely by how well it does its work. The documentary theory in its classic form (*J*, *E*, *P*, and *D*, as well as *R* for redactors or compilers) has proved to be a master key which has opened many doors; and with each such success, the hypothesis has become that much less tentative. The thing to bear in mind, however, is that, where so many unknowns are involved, a reasonable margin of error must be allowed. While the vast majority of passages can now be ascribed to one source or another with considerable confidence, there is still a residue that leaves room for doubt. Some of these marginal portions may have to be reallocated after further study; others are now so fused that they may never be pried apart; and still others appear never to

have had any connection with the relatively tangible sources before us, and may have been independent from the start.

The Book of Genesis provides clearer examples of each of the types just mentioned than is the case with any other part of the Pentateuch.

THE DOCUMENTARY SOURCES OF GENESIS

As the earliest book in the Pentateuch, Genesis is not affected by the special problems that beset the Book of Deuteronomy: it shows no trace whatever of source *D*. But precisely because it deals with the earliest stage, Genesis also raises certain questions that do not arise elsewhere in the Pentateuch. One such question concerns the content of the first eleven chapters, which involve the prehistory of the world as contrasted with the story of the patriarchs of Israel. If the latter story was based on native traditions, what material did the writers utilize for the former? Or how is one to account for the unique character of a chapter like xiv? But before these and similar problems can be isolated and examined, it is necessary to indicate what it is that makes a given passage fall under one of three relatively well-defined rubrics, namely, *J*, *E*, and *P*. In other words, the first task that faces a modern student of Genesis is literary analysis of the book. It is the one area in which documentary criticism has scored truly impressive gains.

A significant milestone in the literary criticism of Genesis was the observation published in 1753 by the French physician Jean Astruc that, when referring to the Deity, some narratives in this book use the personal name Yahweh ("Jehovah"), while other and apparently parallel accounts employ Elohim, the generic Hebrew term for "divine being." It would thus seem to follow, Astruc argued, that Genesis was made up of two originally independent sources.

As matters turned out, the criterion which Astruc introduced was useful principally as a point of departure. There are many sections in Genesis, and elsewhere in the Pentateuch, which do not mention the Deity. Nor is the mere occurrence of Elohim decisive in itself, since the term can also be used, by virtue of its general connotation, not only for alien gods and idols but also in the broader sense of our "Providence, Heaven, Fate," and is actually so attested in the

J source, among others. The evidence remains significant, but one-sided: Elohim could well appear in any document, as is only natural in the circumstances; on the other hand, Yahweh is in Genesis the exclusive companion of *J* (barring occasional lapses in the composite text under the influence of an adjacent passage from another source). To be established, therefore, as homogeneous, a document has to exhibit a combination of distinctive features harmoniously blended; it should stand out by reason of its style, content, and concepts, not to mention the cumulative evidence of the vocabulary. When enough such details have been found to configure time and again, they yield a pattern that is typical of a particular source; at times they may even afford a glimpse of the person behind the written record.

It was on just such collective evidence that the term Elohim, when not paralleled by Yahweh, proved to signal not merely one source, as had been originally assumed, but two otherwise unrelated documents. These came to be labeled respectively as *E* (from the initial letter) and *P* (for Priestly document); the use of Yahweh, on the other hand, remained the hallmark, as was just indicated, of a single author, whose anonymity continues inviolate under the code-letter *J* (from "Jehovah"). The Pentateuch itself lends a measure of credibility to this argument from divine appellations. For Exod vi 3 (*P*) states explicitly, and Exod iii 14 (*E*) indirectly, that the personal name Yahweh was not employed prior to the time of Moses; what this adds up to is that the use of the name Yahweh had been unfamiliar to these two sources until then.³ This lends circumstantial confirmation to the hypothesis of the composite character of the Pentateuch, since the frequent occurrence of the term Yahweh in Genesis would otherwise involve the two passages in Exodus in outright contradiction of inescapable facts. On various other counts, however, *E* sides with *J*, and the two diverge jointly from *P*. All such divergencies are self-explanatory in material that is related but has come down through more than one channel; they could not be explained away in a composition by a single author.

What are, then, the salient characteristics of the several components of Genesis which modern scholarship has been able to isolate? The scope of the present work permits only a sketchy treat-

³ See COMMENT on Sec. 5.

ment, yet this should suffice to illustrate both the method and the results. The comments that follow pertain primarily to *P*, *J*, and *E*—to adopt the order in which these sources first turn up in Genesis. The survey will conclude with a few remarks on passages that are as yet difficult to classify, as well as on the process whereby the separate strands were combined into the unit that now constitutes the received Book of Genesis.

(1) *P*

To begin with vocabulary, *P* employs for the Deity, in addition to Elohîm (Gen i 1 ff.), the term *El Shaddai* (cf. xvii 1), which is usually translated "God Almighty."⁴ The sole occurrence of Yahweh in xvii 1 is apparently a scribal error induced by the similar opening sentence in xviii 1 (*J*), which also records a theophany.

The term that is most typical of this source—one might call it *P*'s signature—is *tôl'dôt*, etymologically "begettings," and hence also genealogy, line, family tree (v 1, vi 9, x 1, etc.), and by extension also story, history; in the latter sense we find this term used in ii 4, and perhaps also in xxxvii 2. Another telltale expression is "to be fertile and increase" (e.g., i 22, 28, viii 17, ix 1, 7). For the homeland of the patriarchs, *P* uses *Paddan-aram* (cf. xxv 20, xxviii 2, 5, 6, 7); *J* calls the same region *Aram-naharaim* (xxiv 10).

For other words and phrases to which *P* is partial, cf. the long list given by Dr. (pp. vii–ix). This vocabulary is not limited, of course, to Genesis, but carries over to other books; it is absent, however, from the parallel documents. Consistency and cumulative impact enhance the total effect of this type of evidence.

P's frequent recourse to the term *tôl'dôt* (the traditional rendering "generations" is now obsolete in the sense required) is a correct reflection of the writer's abiding interest in genealogical detail. There must be no break in the chain of transmission through which God's dispensation has been handed down; hence it is essential to trace the pertinent line all the way back to Creation. For related reasons, *P* is forever concerned with such other statistics as the total life span of the given individual, the age of a father at the

⁴ The exact meaning, however, remains uncertain.

birth of his oldest son (e.g., ch. v), the names of other members of the family, and the like.

P's constant preoccupation with the purity of the line through which God's purpose has been implemented leads at times to motivations that are not found in the parallel versions. For instance, according to *J* (xxvii 41–45), Rebekah told Jacob to flee to her relatives in Haran in order to escape the revenge of his brother Esau. In *P*, however (xxvii 46–xxviii 7), the motive for Jacob's journey to Central Mesopotamia is no more than matrimonial, the search for an acceptable wife: his mother had become disenchanted with Esau's "Hittite" wives, and was determined that her younger son marry within her own class and clan. More surprising still, Rebekah's scheme has the full approval of Isaac, who gives Jacob his warm blessing, although a few verses earlier—this time, however, from another source (xxvii 33–37: *J*)—Isaac was driven to rage and despair by the discovery of Jacob's hoax. *P* is either unaware of, or unmoved by, the drama and pathos of that encounter. What matters to him solely is that Jacob's line be maintained through a worthy wife.

The horizons of *P* are thus sharply circumscribed. His world is not only directed from heaven but heaven-centered. To be sure, it is natural enough that in the majestic account of Creation man's role should be a passive one. Yet elsewhere, too, mortals are conceded little if any individuality. For one aberrant moment Abraham lapses into incredulity when told by God that he is to have a son by Sarah (xvii 17); but his record of absolute obedience is never marred again. The eventful history of Joseph's stay in Egypt is reduced in this source to an exchange of amenities between Jacob and Pharaoh (xlvii 7–10) and the symbolic adoption by Jacob of his grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim (xlviii 3–7). Where history is predetermined in every detail, personalities recede into the background, while the formal relations between God and society become the central theme. There are thus ample grounds—theological as well as ritualistic—for ascribing the *P* document to priestly inspiration.

The question of *P*'s date is difficult to solve for several reasons. Numerous sections, especially in the other books of the Tetrateuch, have long been relegated by the critics to a relatively late age, after the Babylonian Exile in many instances. Of late, however, there has been a growing sentiment—backed by a substantial amount of in-

ternal evidence—in favor of dating various portions of *P* to pre-Exilic times, and in some cases to the premonarchic period. This evidence embraces even certain passages in the ritualistic Book of Leviticus. A careful new look at the *P* material in Genesis is therefore definitely in order.

When we re-examine, for instance, the genealogies of the patriarchs before the Flood (cf. v), the style and approach are unmistakably *P*'s, yet the material has to be derived from ancient data. The same applies to the Edomite lists in ch. xxxvi. Just so—to stray for a moment from the Book of Genesis—the census records in Num xxvi, although again set down by *P*, deal with names and situations (notably the distribution of land holdings by lot) that go back of necessity to the early stages of the Israelite settlement in Canaan. At the same time, there are other passages throughout the Tetrateuch that are undoubtedly much later. All this testifies to a wide coverage by *P*, ranging over many centuries. The conclusion that is usually drawn from these facts is that we have before us a series of separate *P* documents, as many as ten according to some critics. But such solutions fail to account for the prevailing uniformity in outlook and phraseology which typifies *P* as a whole.

The assumption that commends itself in these circumstances is that *P* was not an individual, or even a group of like-minded contemporaries, but a school with an unbroken history reaching back to early Israelite times, and continuing until the Exile and beyond. Such a hypothesis would readily account for the essential homogeneity of the underlying traditions, while not precluding such occasional discrepancies as, for example, in the lists of Esau's wives (cf. xxvi 34, xxviii 9, xxxvi 2-3); such differences might easily develop over a long period of time even among custodians of the same type of traditions. The generally stilted language and the circumscribed range of interests would be similarly explained. The end result would thus represent the carefully nurtured product of a standing scholastic committee, so to speak, in regular session since the inchoate beginnings of ethnic consciousness in Israel.

(2) *J*

Aside from the exclusive use of the name Yahweh, there are in Genesis few words or phrases that immediately betray the hand of *J*; and even such exceptions are all but confined to the Joseph

story. There we find the name *Israel* as against *Jacob* in the other sources; the geographic term *Goshen*; and the noun *'amtahat* "bag" for the otherwise familiar *saq* "sack." On further analysis, the relative scarcity of such shibboleths is not at all surprising. For *J* is not given to stereotypes, in vocabulary or in other respects. What is truly distinctive about this writer is his incisive style, his economy and boldness of presentation, his insight into human nature, and the recognition that a higher order and purpose may lie behind seemingly incomprehensible human events. There is common agreement that we have in *J*—or alternatively, in those portions of Genesis that critical consensus attributes to *J*—not only the most gifted biblical writer, but one of the greatest figures in world literature. If so much in the Book of Genesis remains vivid and memorable to this day, the reason is not merely the content of the tales but, in large measure as well, the matchless way in which *J* has told them.

J's style is clear and direct, but its simplicity is that of consummate art. An unobtrusive word or phrase may become the means for the unfolding of character, a single sentence can evoke a whole picture. The leading actors on *J*'s stage are realized in depth. It is their inner life that invariably attracts the author's attention; yet he manages to show it in action, not through description; and the reader is thus made a participant in the unfolding drama. *J*'s world, moreover, in diametric contrast to *P*'s, is emphatically earth-centered. And his earth is peopled with actors so natural and candid that even their relations with Yahweh are reduced to human scale, so that God himself becomes anthropomorphic.

In the Eden prelude, Adam is portrayed as a lost and confused child, and is so treated by Yahweh (iii 9). Later, in the more sophisticated context of the patriarchal age, human problems gain in complexity. The acute domestic crisis that is brought on by Sarah's childlessness (xvi 1-6) leaves Abraham irresolute in the clash between two headstrong women. Later on (xviii 12), Sarah is impulsive enough to respond with derision to the promise of a child in her waning years. Nor does *J* hesitate to betray his own feelings concerning Jacob's behavior toward Isaac and Esau. Every detail in that intensely stirring account (xxvii 1-40) shows that, although the outcome favored Jacob, the author's personal sympathies lay with the victims of the ruse.

J's art rises perhaps to greatest heights in the handling of the

real climax of the Joseph story (xlv) The author is not concerned in the main with the poetic justice of Joseph's triumph over his brothers, or his magnanimity in forgiving his onetime tormentors. *J*'s interest reaches much deeper. His protagonist himself had been plagued by gnawing doubts which he could not banish from his mind: Had his brothers been morally regenerated in the intervening years? To find the answer, Joseph was forced to resort to an elaborate test, using his full brother Benjamin to bait the trap. When Judah offered himself as substitute for the innocent boy, Joseph had his answer at long last; the brothers had indeed reformed. After the unbearable suspense of this episode, the actual self-disclosure could be no more than an anticlimax.

In *J*'s world view, then, man is not a mere marionette, as he is in *P*'s scheme of things. Rather, the individual is allowed considerable freedom of action, and it is this margin of independence that brings out both his strengths and his weaknesses. At the same time, however, no mortal should make the mistake of assuming that he is in complete control of his destiny. Ultimately, man is but the unwary and unwitting tool in the hands of the Supreme Power who charts the course of the universe. On rare occasions, to be sure, an Abraham may be favored with a fleeting glimpse of the divine purpose. But no one may grasp the complete design, which remains reasonable and just no matter who the chosen agent may be at any given point. This would seem to be the meaning of the unintentional blessing of Jacob by Isaac (xxvii), or the eerie encounter at Peniel (xxxii 23-33). There are more things in heaven and on earth, *J* appears to be implying, than a mortal's wisdom can encompass. In this regard man remains irredeemably human.

It goes without saying that a work with such distinctive personal traits could stem only from an individual author. When it comes, however, to *J*'s date, the indications are not nearly so compelling. The prevailing tendency today is to put *J* in the tenth century B.C., or about a hundred years earlier than was estimated a few decades ago. If the current view is right, *J* may well have been a contemporary of that other outstanding writer to whom we are indebted for the court history of David and his immediate successors (especially II Sam ix-xx). Did the two, then, know each other personally? And if so, what were the relations between them? It would require a latter-day *J* to do justice to a situation of this sort.

It may be of interest to note, in passing, how *J* and *P* compare

in the few instances in which their accounts coincide. Their respective approaches to the story of Joseph have already been touched upon. Otherwise, significant contacts between these two sources are confined to Primeval History (i-xi), and there primarily to the subjects of Creation and the Flood. In the former instance, each version has come down to us as a unit, and basically intact: *P*'s in i 1-ii 4a, and *J*'s in ii 4b-25. The far-reaching differences between these parallel accounts are immediately apparent (cf. the remarks on Secs. 1 and 2) and require no special comment at this time.

The account of the Flood, on the other hand, was fused in the compilation to such a degree that it can no longer be reassembled without surgery at a number of joints. Nevertheless, there is enough internal evidence for a dependable analysis, aside from the external factors of vocabulary and style. Thus the reason for the Flood is cited twice, first by *J* in vi 5-8, and next by *P* in vi 13: in the one instance, Yahweh "regrets" that man has not been able to master his evil impulses, and there is "sorrow in his heart"; in the other formulation, the world is lawless and hence it must be destroyed. In regard to other details, the differences between the two versions are more specific. *J* records that the ark accommodated seven pairs of each kind of bird and clean animal, but only one pair of the unclean species (vii 2-3), whereas *P* knows only of a single pair in each case (vi 19-20, vii 15). There are differences also in connection with the chronology of the Flood. According to *J* (vii 4, 12, viii 6, 10, 12), the rains came down forty days and nights, and the waters disappeared after three times seven days, the whole deluge lasting thus sixty-one days. But in *P*, whose calendar is typically detailed down to the exact day of the given month, the waters held their crest for one hundred and fifty days (vii 24), and they remained on the earth one year and eleven days (vii 11, viii 14). Both the repetitions and the contradictions are accounted for automatically, here as elsewhere, by the presence of two independent sources, each consistent within itself though at variance with the other.

One may ask why such obvious discrepancies were not eliminated by the redactor or compiler to whom we owe the composite version. The answer is significant, for it has a decisive bearing, as we shall see later on, on the whole issue of editorial authority in piecing the pertinent documents together. It is, in sum, this: such authority was exercised, if at all, only with utmost hesitancy and with the barest minimum of substantive change.

(3) *E*

In form and subject matter *E* is closely related to *J*. Together, these two sources stand apart from *P* with its dominant genealogical content. Hence, *J* and *E* are at times difficult, and in some instances impossible, to distinguish from each other. Closer probing, however, has by and large yielded ample evidence for isolating the two documents. The major question on which many critics are as yet undecided concerns the extent of the interrelationship between *J* and *E*. Did either of these sources actually utilize the other, and if so, which had that advantage?⁵ Assuming that *E* came later—which is the prevailing view among the critics—was it *E*'s purpose from the start merely to supplement and correct *J*, or was the former's work entirely independent? It is the view of the present study that the extant material from *E* represents indeed a separate source. But before this position can be defended, it will be necessary to summarize the reasons for assuming the presence of an *E* source in the first place.

When the terms Yahweh and Elohim occur in otherwise duplicate narratives, and the presence of *P* is ruled out on other grounds, there is the inherent probability that the passages with Elohim point to a source that is neither *J* nor *P*. In ch. xxviii, for example, two accounts about Jacob's first stay at Bethel have been blended into a single sequence. One of these components used Elohim (vss. 12, 17), while the other spoke of Yahweh (13, 16). Taken as a unit, the fused version is repetitious; but separately, each strand represents an independent tradition. Similarly, in xxx 25–43, where Jacob's wealth is attributed to his own shrewdness, the patriarch himself refers to Yahweh by name (30). In the next account, however, the success of the scheme is credited to the advice of an angel who conveyed it to Jacob in a dream; and there, significantly enough, the Deity is called Elohim (xxxi 9, 11). The same pattern, in which Elohim or an angel occurs together with dreams, is found in other passages where *J* must be ruled out as the author (notably in xx).

In general, *E* lacks the directness of *J* where man's relations with God are concerned. This is precisely why *E* is led to interpose angels or dreams, or both, the Deity being regarded, it would seem, as too

⁵ Although it is customary to date *J* about a century earlier than *E*, the evidence is so ambiguous that the reverse is by no means ruled out; cf. M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, 2d ed., 1948, p. 40, n. 143.

remote for direct personal intervention. The center of *E*'s world has not shifted all the way to heaven, as it has with *P*; neither is it earth-bound, on the other hand, as in the case of *J*.

E has a tendency, furthermore, to justify and explain rather than let actions speak for themselves. This is true, for example, of the account about Laban's flocks, as has just been indicated; and the same applies to the encounter between Abraham and Abimelech of Gerar (xx). One thus misses in *E* the bold touches that make *J*'s narratives so vivid and memorable. Yet it would be grossly unjust to *E* to dismiss him as a wordy and pedestrian writer. Abraham's ordeal with Isaac (xxii), an account in which *E* certainly had a prominent hand, is a masterpiece of poignant presentation. Basically, however, *E* is interested in events, whereas *J* is concerned with people. This alone would be enough to make a great deal of difference.

Yet all such departures from *J* might conceivably be found in an annotator, and do not of themselves presuppose the existence of a separate and independent *E* source. There are, however, other points that cannot be explained away in like manner. Among the strongest of these are two sets of parallel narratives which differ much too sharply for direct mutual correlation. These examples merit a close look.

The first illustration is based on three intimately related accounts, each of which revolves about the wife-sister motif. The pertinent passages are: (a) xii 10–20; (b) xx 1–18; and (c) xxvi 6–11. The sociological significance of these narratives is discussed in Section 15; it does not concern us here. The documentary bearing of the same cycle is reviewed in Section 25; but since the results are germane to the present context, they may be restated here in brief.

In each instance, a patriarch on a visit to a foreign land pretends to his royal host that his wife is only a sister; he feels that his wife's beauty might be a danger to the husband but not to a brother. In case (a) the encounter involves Abraham and Sarah with the ruler of Egypt; in (b) the same couple confronts Abimelech of Gerar; and in (c) Abimelech is similarly embarrassed by Isaac and Rebekah. In a work by a single author, these three cases taken together would present serious contradictions: Abraham learned nothing from his narrow escape in Egypt, and so tried the same ruse in Gerar; and Abimelech, for his part, was so little sobered by his perilous experience with the first couple as to fall into the identical trap with the next pair. What immediately rules out any such construction is

the fact that Abimelech is depicted as both upright and wise; and after his first attempt misfired, Abraham would not be likely to make the same mistake again. No competent writer would be guilty of such glaring faults in characterization.

But we can dispense with idle conjectures. Incidents (a) and (c) prove to stem from *J*, while (b) goes back to *E*—on independent grounds in each case. And as soon as the two documents come into view, the duplications and contradictions vanish. *J* knew only of two wife-sister episodes (a and c), one featuring Abraham-Sarah-Pharaoh-Egypt, and the other Isaac-Rebekah-Abimelech-Gerar. Each case involves different principals, centers, and generations. In *E*, however, these two episodes became telescoped, thus juxtaposing Abraham and Sarah with Abimelech (b). But while each source remains thus self-consistent, two original incidents branched out into three.

What matters for the moment is whether such a result could have been obtained if *E* was merely an annotator of *J*. Since *E*'s Abimelech was neither a fool nor a knave, but a man of whom the author clearly approves (cf. xx), *E* could scarcely have depicted the king as he does had he been familiar with *J*'s narrative in xxvi. The only reasonable conclusion, therefore, that one can draw from the joint evidence of all three narratives is that *J* and *E* worked independently. Each was acquainted with the wife-sister motif in patriarchal times, but the respective details had come down through different channels and developed some variations in the course of transmission.

Another compelling argument for viewing *E* as a separate rather than supplementary source is provided by the Joseph story. In spite of its surface unity, this celebrated narrative yields, on closer scrutiny, two parallel strands which are similar in general outline, yet markedly different in detail. Since a comprehensive discussion is included with the running commentary on the pertinent sections, a schematic recapitulation should suffice at this point.

In the *J* version, which continues to employ the divine name Yahweh, Judah persuades his brothers not to kill Joseph but sell him instead to Ishmaelites, who dispose of him in Egypt to an unnamed official. Joseph's new master soon promotes him to the position of chief retainer. But the lies of the master's faithless wife land the boy in jail. Still, Joseph's fortunes again take a favorable turn. . . . When the brothers are on their way home from their first mission to

Egypt with a supply of precious grain, they open their bags at a night stop and are shocked to find in them the full payment for their purchases. . . . In due time, Judah prevails on his father to let Benjamin accompany them on a second journey to Egypt, in reluctant compliance with the Vizier's demand. . . . Judah finally convinces Joseph that the brothers have really reformed. Joseph invites Israel—the name Jacob does not appear in this version—to settle with his family in the district of Goshen.

E's parallel account is marked on the surface by the consistent use of Elohim and Jacob, as opposed to Yahweh and Israel. But the differences from *J* reach much deeper. Joseph is saved from his brothers by Reuben, not Judah; the boy is left in an empty cistern, where he is picked up, unbeknown to the brothers, by Midianites; it is they, and not the Ishmaelites, who sell the boy as a slave to an Egyptian by the name of Potiphar. In that lowly position, Joseph must serve, not supervise, the prisoners in his owner's charge. . . . The brothers open their sacks (not bags) upon their return home (not at an encampment along the way). Reuben (not Judah) gives Jacob (not Israel) his personal guarantee of Benjamin's safe return. . . . Pharaoh (not Joseph) invites Jacob and his family to settle in Egypt (not just Goshen).

From all this, it must be obvious to the unbiased observer that the Joseph story is composed of two once separate, though now intertwined, accounts. One of these is manifestly *J*'s, not only because of the divine name that it employs but also because of a full complement of other characteristics that have elsewhere been established for that source. On analogous grounds, the parallel version aligns itself with *E*. But *E* is here much more than a mere annotator or an occasional dissenter; the dichotomy is much too sharp and sustained for such an interpretation. *E* tells a complete and essentially independent story of his own. If he knew *J*'s version at all, there was very little in it with which he agreed. In all probability, however, he was unaware of the other tradition, with its consistently different pattern of details.

For reasons that are no longer apparent, *E* has no part in the Primeval History (i–xi), unlike both *J* and *P*; his work may never have reached back beyond Abraham. Actually, the first substantial contribution by *E* is not in evidence until ch. xx, well past the middle of the Abraham story. It is improbable that this is where it started originally. An initial section could well have been lost in the early

stages of transmission. In any event, fragmentary preservation of a work cannot be used as an argument about its original scope.

There are no reliable data for fixing the time of the composition of the *E* source with any degree of accuracy. Most critics are inclined to place the date of *E* in the ninth century or later, that is, at least a century after the date assigned to *J*. It should be stressed in passing, however, that *E*, no less than *J*, had access to authentic ancient traditions, a fact that is particularly noticeable in the accounts about Jacob (cf. COMMENT on xxxi) and Joseph (see xli).

(4) *The Residue*

After the three major sources of Genesis have thus reclaimed all the material that could be plausibly assigned to them, there still remain some sections which have proved elusive for one reason or another. Two of these (30 and 51) were actually considered by the older critics as more or less safely identified, but recent students have shown greater diffidence in the matter. A third passage (Sec. 17), however, has always been viewed as unique and without documentary mates anywhere in the Bible. A brief analysis of these passages will be followed by a few remarks about the work of *R*—the redactor or redactors of Genesis.

Section 30: The Machpelah Purchase (xxiii). Certain portions of this chapter appear to support the older view, which regards the narrative as part of the *P* document. It is a fact, moreover, that *P* refers to the Machpelah purchase more than once (xxv 9f., xlix 29f., l 13). Nevertheless, the opposing argument would seem to carry greater weight. The account is not only narrative in character, but is marked by a mock solemnity that is totally out of keeping with the sober manner of *P*. Besides, the repeated description of members of the local council as "those who came in at the gate of his city" (vss. 10, 18) has its idiomatic complement in the phrase "those who went out by the gate of his city," which occurs twice in xxxiv (24), a narrative that stems from *J*.⁶ What this adds up to is that *P* appropriated and introduced the account in question because legal title to the Machpelah burial ground was considered vital by that source; but the secular overtones of the story did not suffer

⁶ On these two idioms, see BASOR 144 (1956), 20 ff.

in the process. The end result was an excerpt from *J* in a framework by *P*, a unique blend in itself.

Section 61: The Testament of Jacob (xlix 1–27). On the misleading title "Blessing of Jacob," see COMMENT *ad loc.* This poem has long been recognized as a product of the premonarchic age in Israel. The composition must, therefore, antedate all of the standard documentary sources. To be sure, verse 18 contains a reference to Yahweh, but the brief sentence in which it occurs is evidently a marginal gloss. It is possible, however, that *J* incorporated this collection of poetic sayings about the tribal eponyms as a fitting pronouncement by Jacob on the eve of his death. In any event, the authorship of the poem has to be designated by an "X," at least for the time being.

Section 17: Invasion from the East. Abraham and Melchizedek (xiv). This unique account has always been a question mark to the critics. The entire chapter departs from the rest of the book in subject matter, approach, emphasis, and phraseology. There are indications that the narrative may have been assimilated from a non-Israelite source. Chief among these is the fact that Abraham is referred to as "the Hebrew" (vs. 13); elsewhere, this description is applied to Israelites only by outsiders or for the benefit of outsiders; the Israelites did not use it among themselves in an ethnic sense. Incidentally, if the extra-Israelite origin of this chapter is borne out, the above reference would go a long way toward establishing the historicity of "Abram"—for an outside source would hardly be likely to make a central figure of a foreign legendary hero. Significantly enough, the Abram in question is depicted as a powerful chieftain, a far cry from the patriarch whom we know from the other traditions.

R. Lastly, a brief comment is appropriate about the joining of the several sources under review into one integrated unit. For this particular process critics are generally inclined to posit two separate redactional (*R*) stages: an earlier one, which combined *J* and *E* (*RJE*); and a much later stage, which linked the work of *P* with the already merged *JE*. The alternative would be to assume a single redactional effort, after *P* had taken definite shape.

We know that the original material from *J* and *E* was left substantially intact through the simple device of treating parallel accounts as consecutive—most notably so in the Joseph story. This holds true, to a considerable degree, even of shorter passages, for

example, xxviii 10–22, where separate verses, rather than paragraphs or chapters, were excerpted and rearranged to yield a consecutive text. No concerted attempt was made to harmonize the composite version by ridding it of duplications and inconsistencies, although at least some of these flaws (e.g., xxxvii 28) must have been apparent at the outset. It follows that the person or persons responsible for the compilation pursued a policy of minimal editorial interference. And this, in turn, could only mean that the respective constituents had already attained a measure of canonical status. Thus *R*'s approach was one of utmost reverence for his—or their—sources. Indeed, if it had not been so, modern recovery of the underlying documents would have been seriously impeded, if not blocked altogether.

Because of such self-effacement, however, there is next to nothing that can be gathered today about the personal traits of *R*. Even the number of stages involved in the process remains in doubt, as was indicated above. The only thing that may safely be assumed is that, if *RJE* was distinct from *RP*, both had nevertheless the same conception of their function and authority.

If the entire compilation, however, was accomplished in a single stage, one further deduction should be permitted. It was suggested earlier that *P* was, in all probability, not an individual writer but an established school in continuous operation over a long period of time. In that case, the activities of such an academy would not have come to a halt after the document that we now attribute to *P* had assumed definitive shape. The next logical step would be precisely the kind of compilation that was ultimately to result in the present Book of Genesis, and the rest of the Pentateuch; and in that case, *R* would be a late product of the *P* school. It should be borne in mind that, analogously, the eventual adoption of a formal Pentateuchal canon, followed by the canons of the Prophets and the Writings, and finally by the complete canon of the Hebrew Bible, was a work based on prolonged study and deliberation of a continuous synod. To be sure, there is no concrete evidence to support such a conjecture; but neither are there any compelling arguments against it.

It should be emphasized, in passing, that the position advocated in the foregoing survey is based throughout on the methods of documentary criticism, and that it reduces the latest results to bare fundamentals. Departures from older views are relatively few and slight. Some readers might raise the valid objection that the whole presentation is oversimplified; the alternative, however, would have been a

detailed technical analysis far beyond the scope of the present work. On the other hand, failure to mention other conjectured sources and sub-sources should be ascribed not to lack of space but to lack of confidence in the reasoning behind such proposals. The fragmentation and proliferation of documents in which some authorities have indulged appears to this writer to be a self-defeating procedure. The suitability of a working hypothesis must be judged ultimately by how well the scheme works.

If the preceding section has thus been a restatement by and large, the two sections that follow venture into territory that has been little explored so far. It is only fair to warn the reader in advance.

THE TRADITION BEHIND THE DOCUMENTS

Disclosure of the documentary sources of the Pentateuch cannot in itself be the end of the trail; it is but a means to further and more productive ends. Literary criticism, for all its labors and accomplishments to date, cannot as yet rest on its laurels. And as it pushes ahead, past its onetime objectives, it is bound to run into other lines of inquiry which start out from extra-biblical records. The chronological level at which these investigations converge is known to biblical students as the patriarchal age. And the book that is most intimately affected is Genesis.

The foregoing analysis of the sources of Genesis could not but show that the three principal documents—*J*, *E*, and *P*—exhibit far-reaching agreements as well as marked disagreements. The differences affect a large body of detail. The agreements, on the other hand, pertain to the general content and the central theme of the work. Thus both *J* and *P* follow similar outlines of Primeval History; and all three sources reflect the same basic data in regard to the patriarchs: family tree, migration from Mesopotamia, settlement in Canaan, beginning of the sojourn in Egypt. The common themes continue in the subsequent books of the Pentateuch, and comprise the oppression in Egypt, the Exodus, and the wanderings in the desert. Now both these aspects of the biblical sources—their mutual agreements as well as their disagreements—prove to be important guides to further study.

Since it is evident on a number of counts that the documents before us are basically independent, in spite of the common subject

matter, it follows that all three must have drawn on the same prototype. This point has already been made for *J* and *E* by several scholars, notably Martin Noth, who designates the assumed predecessor by the symbol *G*, abstracted from "gemeinsame Grundlage" (common base).⁷ But this symbol and the reasoning behind it run into a serious methodological objection: the underlying term *Grundlage* implies a written source; but any such implication should be scrupulously avoided, at least for the time being.

It is not improbable, to be sure, that some of the original data were preserved and transmitted in written form. The very circumstance, however, that our sources exhibit so many mutual disagreements should be enough to suggest that the channels through which much of the material has been handed down were fluid rather than fixed. And this implies, in turn, a predominantly oral mode of transmission; a written source would scarcely have given rise to so large a number of deviations. It should be remembered, moreover, that *J* and *E* were not the only recipients of traditional material. *P*, too, was a prominent beneficiary; note, for example, his accounts of Creation and the Flood. The one thing that can be safely inferred at this stage is that none of the standard sources of Genesis—and the same applies also to the rest of the Pentateuch—improved its subject matter as it went along. In these circumstances, the logical symbol for our hypothetical antecedent would seem to be "*T*,"⁸ for Tradition, a term that has the added advantage of enjoying international currency.

As a bridge between the Pentateuchal sources and the past that these documents record, "*T*" unblocks the path to further study. The subject can now be viewed in truer perspective. One can understand, for example, why none of the writers who drew on "*T*" was free with his subject matter—a point that was by no means self-evident to the early critics: each author was bound by the data that had come down to him. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that *J* and *E* were able to achieve literary masterpieces despite such curbs.

What was it, then, that made the received material normative and impelled gifted writers to hold their imagination in check? The an-

⁷ Cf. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte* . . . , pp. 40 ff.

⁸ In quotation marks, so as to distinguish this assumed source from extant documents designated by simple initials.

swer is not far to seek. *J*, and *E*, and *P* as well, were writing, each in his way, not stories, but history. The data were not to be tampered with because tradition had stamped them as inviolable; and they had acquired an aura of sanctity because the subject matter was not secular but spiritual history, history a writer might recount, but could not color to his own liking. The retelling, in short, was the Bible in the making.

That the unfolding story was selective rather than comprehensive is attested in the Bible itself; not just in the Pentateuch but also in other historical books. The writers remind us time and again that theirs is a special theme. The reader who may be interested in other aspects is told explicitly where he can find them: in *The Book of the Wars of Yahweh* (Num xxi 14); the *Chronicle of Solomon* (I Kings xi 41); *The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel* (I Kings xiv 19, xv 31, xvi 5); or *The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah* (I Kings xiv 29, xv 7, xxii 46). The first of these references is especially instructive, for it occurs in an archaic passage which antedates the monarchic age, and hence also any of the standard documentary sources. Its date falls, accordingly, within the period of "*T*." In other words, criteria for distinguishing between "biblical" and secular themes had already been evolved by that time.⁹

At this point it may be advisable to pause and take stock. A selective medium like "*T*" presupposes the existence of some screening canon. This is not to be confused, of course, with the final Old Testament canon, which was not brought to a close until the beginning of the present era. Yet the basic concept and the guiding criteria would have to be much the same in all such instances. Is it not hazardous, then, to assume canonical standards for pre-Davidic times, solely on the basis of the circumstantial evidence that has been cited so far? The answer is that the whole story has not yet been told. More evidence does in fact exist, but it is based on the combined yield of biblical and extra-biblical sources. The pertinent material must now be sampled.

Among the various patriarchal themes in Genesis, there are three in particular that exhibit the same blend of uncommon features: each theme appears to involve some form of deception; each has proved to be an obstinate puzzle to countless generations of students, ancient and modern; and at the same time, each was seemingly just

⁹ Cf. my paper on "Three Thousand Years of Bible Study," *Centennial Review* (Michigan State University) 4 (1960), 206-22.

as much of an enigma to the biblical writers themselves. In all three cases, unexpected help has recently come from the same outside quarter.

(1) The first case in point is itself compounded of three closely related passages (xii 10–20, xx 1–18, xxvi 6–11) which have already been discussed in another connection. The joint theme here is the wife-sister motif: a patriarch's wife is introduced as his sister. The subject was recorded by both *J* (xii, xxvi) and *E* (xx), which implies prior, and presumably oral, handling by "T." At all events, there are enough differences in detail to presuppose a long period of antecedent transmission; besides, *E*'s involved explanation of the incident, and his endeavor to exonerate the persons concerned, would seem to betray an element of uncertainty, not to say embarrassment, on the part of the author.

Today, however, there can be no longer any serious doubt as to what was really at issue (see the detailed COMMENT on Sec. 15). In Hurrian society a wife enjoyed special standing and protection when the law recognized her simultaneously as her husband's sister, regardless of actual blood ties. Such cases are attested by two separate legal documents, one dealing with the marriage and the other with the woman's adoption as sister. This dual role conferred on the wife a superior position in society.

As a onetime inhabitant of Haran—an old Hurrian center—Abraham was necessarily familiar with Hurrian social practices. Hence when he and his son, on visits to foreign lands, spoke of their wives as sisters, they were apparently intent not so much on improving their own prospects as on extolling and protecting their wives. But this is not the explanation that is given in the accounts of the incidents; there the motive is definitely selfish. Of the two interpretations, one based on original and contemporary records of a society that is closely involved, and the other found in much later literary narratives, the first is obviously to be preferred. Egypt¹⁰ and Gerar were hundreds of miles away from Haran. And by the time of *J* and *E* there had developed the further gap of hundreds of years. The import of so specialized a practice would scarcely be retained over such distances. Another explanation would be substi-

¹⁰ The brother-sister marriages in Egypt are of an entirely different type; nor would this superficial parallel apply to Gerar. For the subject as a whole see the writer's essay "The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives," *Biblical and Other Studies*, Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 15–28.

tuted in course of time, one more in keeping with local conditions and universal human failings.

Our main concern for the present, however, is neither with the sociological nor the moral aspects of the incidents under discussion. What we are concerned with is, first, why tradition insisted on recording these episodes; and second, why both *J* and *E* included them in their histories even though they could not be altogether clear about the meaning. The answer to the first question is tied up with the established superior status of the wife-sister. Sarah and Rebekah were vital links in the chain through which the biblical way of life was being transmitted; and the purity of the line had a bearing on the quality of the content. Thus any detail that pointed up the privileged position of the patriarchs' wives was bound to be cherished by tradition.

The second question, namely, why *J* and *E* were obliged to record these episodes, whether or not they understood their significance, goes to the heart of the matter. They had to do so, because they were not free to choose. Nothing that tradition had nurtured could be ignored by its eventual literary executors. And this is but another way of saying that the transmitted material had already acquired a measure of canonical status.

(2) The next illustration pertains to the transfer of birthright and paternal blessing from Esau to Jacob (Sec. 35 [xxvii 1–45: *J*]). Once again, the incident involves deception, this time of a singularly heartless sort. Biblical tradition itself accepted the whole episode at face value, inasmuch as it went on to explain the name Jacob as symbolic of trickery—contrary to correct etymology. And exegetes through the ages have been shaking their heads in disapproval, or taxing their ingenuity for redeeming features. The true explanation, however, lies elsewhere.

The clue is provided again by records about Hurrian society. There, birthright was not necessarily a matter of chronological priority; it could be established by the father's personal decision. Moreover, the most solemn of all testamentary dispositions were those that a man made on his deathbed. And such dispositions were introduced by the formula "I have now grown old."

In the biblical episode, Isaac's impending end is foreshadowed by a comment about his advanced age (vs. 2). The patriarch then transfers to his younger son the rights and privileges of the first-born, which it was within his discretion to do, according to the law

of his father's homeland. Tradition took note of the deed, and even preserved the exact introductory formula. But the pertinent social background had become blurred in the meantime; in fact, the practice in question was eventually outlawed altogether (Deut xxi 15 ff.). In the nature of things, another motive was substituted; *J* did not find it adequate, as the tenor of his narrative plainly shows. He could not know that Jacob's preferment did not have to depend on falsehoods. Yet the author's personal feelings on the subject gave him no leave to alter the received data that tradition had shaped and sanctioned long before.

(3) Our third and last case in point revolves about Rachel's surreptitious removal of Laban's house gods (xxxi 19, 30; cf. the fuller COMMENT *ad loc.*). The narrative stems from *E*, who ordinarily takes pains to justify the actions of his principal characters. This time, however, he makes no attempt to account for Rachel's behavior, evidently because he was unable to do so. Innumerable writers since then have tried to find a solution, without coming close to the mark. The correct interpretation calls for detailed knowledge of social conditions in the patriarchal age and center. That information, however, was cut off subsequent to the migration from Mesopotamia; and it was not restored until archaeology had brought to light the necessary evidence from the pertinent sources themselves.

According to Hurrian family law—which played a prominent role in patriarchal society, as we have seen—property passed normally to male descendants. If a daughter, however, was to share in the inheritance for one reason or another, it was customary for the father to hand over his house gods to the woman's husband, as proof that the disposition was legitimate, though exceptional. In this case, Rachel had no illusions about her father's honesty (see xxxi 15 f.). By going off with Laban's images—and thus taking the law, or what she thought to be the law, into her own hands—she evidently hoped to make sure that her husband would not be done out of his rightful dividends from a marriage for which he had labored so long. Tradition remembered the deed, but not its motivation. And the writer could neither ignore tradition nor presume to edit its content.

Taken together, these three old and familiar themes acquire new significance by reason of their special bearing on the subject of biblical origins. Each is an authentic reflection of the complex social conditions to which it alludes. Since the biblical writers had no direct access to the ultimate sources, they must have obtained this

material through some such medium as "T." But that intermediary was no longer able to hand over the complete story; the motivation, which could be taken for granted at the outset, had ceased to be self-evident in the course of the intervening centuries. The necessary background has to be retraced to Haran, where the patriarchal clan had lived in intimate symbiosis with Hurrian society. In other words, it was there that "T" itself must have gotten its start. The uniform evidence of the illustrations that have just been given, not to mention others that could have been cited, surely rules out the remotest possibility of coincidence.

One question still remains to be posed, a question that is basic to this entire discussion. Granted that an authentic patriarchal tradition originated in Central Mesopotamia, some time before the middle of the second millennium B.C.—what was it that gave that tradition the ability to remain virtually intact, and the appeal that was to make it canonical in due time? The answer to this question is bound up with the experience itself which gave biblical tradition its original momentum.

GENESIS OF THE BIBLICAL PROCESS

We have seen that various details of the patriarchal story in Genesis are now confirmed and elucidated by outside sources. The data have come from the very area to which the book refers, the portion of Mesopotamia which the patriarchs called their home. Since the background has thus emerged as authentic, one is prompted to ask whether the foreground, too, may not be factual on the whole. And the foreground in this instance is the dramatic content of the story.

At the start of this analysis, it was logical to begin with the biblical data and go on to outside sources. Now conditions are reversed, since the focal event, the migration that set the whole process in motion, originated in Mesopotamia—precisely where both biblical and outside testimony have led us. Accordingly, the patriarchs will now be viewed against the pertinent Mesopotamian setting; the results will then be compared with biblical statements on the subject.

Although there is as yet no firm basis for dating the patriarchal period—which must technically be put down as prehistoric until a

direct synchronism with the outside world can be established—conservative estimates would anchor that age in the second quarter of the second millennium B.C. (approximately the eighteenth–sixteenth centuries). In terms of equally conservative Mesopotamian chronology, such a span would take in much of the Old Babylonian Dynasty, from Hammurabi¹¹ down. Now the reign of Hammurabi dovetails with that of another outstanding monarch, Shamshi-Adad I of Assyria, and it parallels an illustrious stage at Mari. All these phases are richly illuminated by a great variety of sources. For the decades that immediately followed, we now have, among other sources, the new material from the Syrian center of Alalakh. And for the transition from Old to Middle Babylonian times, there is the vivid evidence of the Nuzi records, which were composed by Hurrians who had long been exposed to Babylonian influence; and this source has recently been supplemented by texts from later levels at Alalakh.

Thanks to this manifold and extensive testimony, we now have a balanced picture of Mesopotamian conditions in the first half of the second millennium, not just in Babylonia but also in the peripheral areas to the north and west, where Amorites and Hurrians were entrenched. The over-all yield is that of a cosmopolitan, progressive, and sophisticated civilization: a common heritage of law and government, a legacy stabilized by the use of the same script and language, safeguarded social gains and facilitated international relations. Writing was ubiquitous, not only as the medium of law, administration, and business, but also as a vehicle for literary and scientific endeavors. Aside from jurisprudence, outstanding advances had been achieved in such disciplines as linguistics, mathematics, and the study of history. Architecture and the arts flourished, agriculture and animal husbandry were highly developed, and far-flung commercial enterprises added to the material prosperity. Indeed, on most of these counts, the classical lands of a thousand years later appear as yet primitive by comparison. In short, the Mesopotamia of Hammurabi and his neighbors was the most advanced land in the world—a vigorous force at home and a magnet to other countries near and far.

Yet, if the record in Genesis is to be given credence, it was at

¹¹ The correct transliteration is *Hammurapi*; but the form with *b* has been retained as the more familiar of the two.

that juncture that Abraham turned his back on his homeland and set out for a destination unfamiliar and unsung. What could have prompted him to make such a move? According to Gen xii 1, it was a call from the Deity. To be sure, tradition was bound to look upon the remote past in reverent and idealized retrospect. This is why Abraham emerges as a simple nomad devoted to pastoral ways, although a product of the urban society of Mesopotamia. Yet the same tradition, as we just saw, succeeded in preserving much of the background detail with remarkable accuracy. Moreover, the fact of migration from Mesopotamia is borne out by a mass of circumstantial evidence too vast to itemize here. Since the setting was not invented, and the migration is amply supported, the stated reason for the journey should not be dismissed offhand. And that reason, reduced to basic terms, was a spiritual one.

So far, our inquiry into the remoter reaches of biblical history has not been unduly hazardous. Every so often along the way there have been markers by which we could check our bearings. The common subject matter of the *J* and *E* narratives pointed to an underlying predocumentary stage ("T"). The essential trustworthiness of "T" was vouched for, in turn, by the evidence of cuneiform records. Finally, the starting point of the biblical process—that is, Central Mesopotamia in the age of Hammurabi—was found to be brightly illuminated by various contemporary sources.

Now, however, we can no longer count on such tangible support. The task before us is to re-enact in our minds the experience that impelled Abraham to break with his past and set out on an epic journey, thereby setting in motion a process that was to be sustained throughout the entire course of biblical history. Does such an assignment hold out much hope of worth-while results? There is clearly a limit beyond which circumstantial evidence ceases to afford reasonably safe conduct and lets one proceed only at ever-increasing risk. That limit has now been reached.

Although there is no proof so far of Abraham's historicity, many biblical historians would probably agree that if some such figure had not been recorded by the ancients, it would have to be conjectured by the moderns. But it is one thing to concede Abraham's existence, and quite another thing to attempt to read his mind at a critical juncture in his life. Nevertheless, the effort is worth making, for two reasons: first, because a great deal is at stake, namely, the genesis of the biblical process; and second, because there are

still some resources available for checking such an assumption. To be sure, the controls in this case are general rather than specific. Yet the same test must fit so many different conditions that a wrong turn at any one point would show up soon enough. If the hypothesis, however, stands up throughout, if it helps to account for much that would be incomprehensible otherwise, its usefulness, if not its absolute accuracy, will have been validated.

Since the first problem before us is to establish the motive for Abraham's break with his homeland, the clues that we require have to be sought in Mesopotamia. And if the reason for the migration was spiritual, as the Bible asserts, the cause should be traceable to the society that Abraham abandoned. Or to state it differently, we start with the assumption that Abraham found the spiritual solution of Mesopotamia wanting, and that the biblical process began as a protest against that failure.

The vibrant character of Mesopotamian civilization as a whole, and particularly so during the period under discussion, has already been stressed. By the time of Hammurabi, that civilization had established itself as a dynamic force at home and abroad. Nor can there be much doubt that social progress was the overriding factor in that advance. The Mesopotamian concept of the cosmos, which barred autocracy even in heaven, also made for a regime on earth whereby the law was above the ruler and thus stood guard over the rights of the individual. In various ways, this social system was responsible for the country's balanced progress in governmental, intellectual, and scientific matters.¹² And it sustained the historic civilization of Mesopotamia—as opposed to its several prehistoric stages—throughout its long career, from its dawn at the turn of the fourth millennium to the sudden collapse some twenty-five centuries later. The age of Hammurabi was thus approximately the halfway mark along that impressive span. It was also the high-water mark in a cultural sense. Yet Abraham appears to have viewed it as a failure.

To ascribe such disenchantment to the patriarch's West Semitic antecedents would not do justice to known facts. Hammurabi himself was a member of a West Semitic dynasty, although in his case that foreign background was too remote to have made a difference.

¹² E. A. Speiser, "Some Sources of Intellectual and Social Progress in the Ancient Near East," *W. G. Leland Volume*, 1942, pp. 51-62.

But there were other Amorite rulers to the west and north of Babylonia who had not had enough time to become assimilated; yet most of them became ardent converts to the Babylonian way of life. The celebrated Shamshi-Adad I, for example, could be described as Babylon's cultural missionary to Assyria. And correspondence from outlying regions, including the district of Har(r)an itself, and even distant and powerful states like Aleppo, testifies to the eager acceptance by Amorites of the civilization of Southern Mesopotamia. Hence it would scarcely be normal for a native of Mesopotamia, whatever his ethnic origins, to look for greener pastures elsewhere.

Now it is true that Genesis portrays Abraham as a nomad of simple tastes, for whom the refinements of urban life held little charm, unlike his nephew Lot (xiii 12). Would not this attitude be reason enough for pulling up stakes and going off to a land where kindred Amorites still maintained their ancient mode of life? Perhaps so, provided that this particular image of Abraham is in true focus. Actually, however, tradition's views of the distant past became at times oversimplified in nostalgic retrospect. A more realistic picture of the patriarch is reflected in Gen xiv, precisely because that chapter departs sharply from the traditional mold. In that account, Abraham—or rather Abram, as he was then called—appears as a prosperous settler who can mobilize on short notice a sizable troop from among his own retainers and put an invading horde to rout. Clearly, therefore, there must have been more to the patriarch's migration than a vague impulse to revert to the idyllic ways of his distant ancestors. Moreover, the whole tenor of the Abraham story reflects a concern about the future rather than the past. Mesopotamia, it would seem, was not a suitable base for planning ahead.

Yet the inferred shortcomings cannot be laid to prevailing social conditions, as we have seen. The evolving Hebrew society had enough in common, in this respect, with the historic society of Mesopotamia to presuppose not only generic affiliation but also basic accord. In both instances we find the same reverence for law impersonally conceived, and the identical concept of non-autocratic government on earth. Such fundamental agreements would scarcely argue for a rejection of the Mesopotamian social system on the part of the Hebrew patriarchs. But in the ancient world in general, and the Near East in particular, the social aspect of a civilization was intimately related to its religious aspect: the two interlocked. If it

was not, then, the social climate that drove Abraham from Mesopotamia, could local religion provide a plausible motive?

The answer may not be far to seek. In Mesopotamia, the very tenets that stimulated the social growth of the country proved to be a source of weakness in its spiritual progress. The terrestrial state was non-autocratic because man took his cue from the gods; and in the celestial state no one god was a law unto himself, not even the head of the pantheon. All major decisions in heaven required approval by the corporate body of the gods. And since nothing was valid for all time, the upshot was chronic indecision in heaven and consequent insecurity on earth. Man's best hope to get a favorable nod from the cosmic powers lay, it was felt, in ritualistic appeasement. And as the ritual machinery grew more and more cumbersome, the spiritual content receded ever farther, until it all but disappeared from the official system. When social gains could no longer balance the spiritual deficit, Mesopotamian civilization as a whole ceased to be self-sustaining.

To be sure, the golden age of Hammurabi, with which the early patriarchal period has to be correlated, was more than a millennium away from the collapse of Assyria and Babylonia; it would not appear to be a ripe time for spiritual forebodings. Nevertheless, there must have been occasional doubts even then about the religious solution which local society had evolved. As a matter of fact, the earliest known composition on the subject of the Suffering Just—or the Job theme—dates from Old Babylonian times. Thus Abraham would not have been alone in his religious questioning. However, if the biblical testimony is anywhere near the mark, he was the first to follow up such thoughts with action.

Since the Mesopotamian system was vulnerable chiefly because of its own type of polytheism, a possible remedy that an inquiring mind might hit upon would lie in monotheism. But to conceive of such an ideal initially, without any known precedent in the experience of mankind, called for greater resources than those of logic alone. It meant a resolute rejection of common and long-cherished beliefs, a determined challenge to the powers that were believed to dominate every aspect of nature, and the substitution of a single supreme being for that hostile coalition. The new belief, in short, would call for unparalleled inspiration and conviction. Without that kind of call, Abraham could not have become the father of the biblical process.

To summarize the reasoning thus far, the genesis of the biblical way is bound up with the beginnings of the monotheistic concept; both converge in the age, and presumably also the person, of Abraham. To this extent, the present reconstruction is in broad accord with the tenor of biblical tradition. Unlike traditional tenets, however, a historical hypothesis cannot be accepted on faith; it must meet the test of independent controls. In the present instance, the controls are implicit in the internal evidence of biblical history as a whole. But before the test is attempted, one important point needs to be clarified in passing.

In adducing monotheism and polytheism as contrasting factors in the story of mankind, the student of history must steer clear of subjective involvement with these theological systems in the abstract. His sole business is to ascertain what the respective concepts contributed pragmatically. The judgment must be based of necessity on what the given system accomplished in the long run. The question of independent validity cannot be at issue in this instance.

The effects of Mesopotamian polytheism on the local civilization have already been outlined. Because the cosmos was viewed as a state in which ultimate authority was vested in the collective assembly of the gods, mortals were, paradoxically enough, both gainers and losers. Human society followed the lead of the gods in adopting an anti-authoritarian form of government. But since heaven itself was subject to instability, mankind too lacked the assurance of absolute and universal principles.

Monotheism, on the other hand, is predicated on the concept of a God who has no rivals, and is therefore omnipotent. As the unchallenged master of all creation, he has an equal interest in all of his creatures. Since every nation has the same claim to his care, each can aspire to just and impartial treatment in conformance with its conduct. The same holds true of individuals. It is thus causality and not caprice that is the norm of the cosmos. Impersonal justice, moreover, is conducive to objective standards of ethics and morality.

The history of the biblical process is ultimately the story of the monotheistic ideal in its gradual evolution. That ideal was first glimpsed and pursued by a single society in resolute opposition to prevailing beliefs. In the course of that quest, certain truths emerged which proved to possess universal validity, hence their progressive

recognition and acceptance; hence, too, the abiding appeal of the Bible as the comprehensive record of that quest. The inception of the underlying process becomes thus a matter of unique interest and significance. As has been emphasized repeatedly, all signs so far have pointed to Abraham as the pioneer. To what extent is this borne out by the internal evidence of biblical history?

Once Israel had been established as a political entity, any retracement of its spiritual history was bound to operate in the shadow of the towering figure of Moses. This is in no way surprising. Even in the sharper perspective of today, a perspective made possible by an ever-quickenning flow of discovery, Moses stands unchallenged as the founder of the Israelite nation. By the same token, however, Mount Sinai emerges as a vital stage on the road to nationhood, but not as its starting point. The biblical concept of a nation stresses three features above all others: (1) a body of religious beliefs; (2) an integral system of law; and (3) a specific territorial base. It was the heroic achievement of Moses to have rallied an amorphous agglomerate of serfs and nomads and imbued them with a will to independent nationhood. To that end he proclaimed Yahweh as the one and supreme God, put together a legal code, and led his fractious followers to the borders of the Promised Land. Yet the religious content is invariably characterized as ancestral, the faith of the forefathers. The law, it is true, becomes a personal revelation from the Deity, in a manner that is traditional with all ancient legislators; but most of the legal provisions involved have demonstrable pre-Mosaic antecedents and can often be traced back paragraph by paragraph, sometimes even word for word. And the theme of the Promised Land is prominent with all the patriarchs, and central to the mission of Abraham. Thus the earlier traditions themselves ascribe the original program to Abraham and credit Moses primarily with its execution. This may not do full justice to Moses' over-all achievement, the strength and the perseverance and the faith that went into it, and the toll that it took. Nevertheless, the ultimate inspiration derived from an earlier vision, a vision that required a long time to incubate, one that Moses set out to validate in all humility. While it is thus true that Israel as a nation would be inconceivable without Moses, the work of Moses would be equally unthinkable without the prior labors of the patriarchs. The covenant of Mount Sinai is a natural sequel to God's covenant with Abraham. The

two together become the twin cornerstones of the spiritual history of Israel, and are honored as such throughout the Bible.

When it comes, therefore, to the genesis of the biblical process, the internal evidence of the Bible itself goes hand in hand with the results of modern biblical study based in large measure on the testimony of outside sources. Both sets of data point to the age of Abraham; each in its own way enhances the probability of Abraham as a historical figure. And if the term probability appears too sanguine in this connection, in view of the tenuous and circumstantial nature of the evidence, it should be remembered that the case for Moses is analogous in kind, though not in degree. Furthermore, the argument for Abraham is not as yet exhausted. A significant final point still remains to be cited.

Biblical history proper, as distinct from primeval history, begins in Genesis with chapter xii. This beginning comes with startling suddenness. The preceding chapter concluded with a notice about Abraham's family which betrays the hand of *J*, followed by a typical statement from *P* about Abraham's stopping in Haran, although he had started out for Canaan. Even *P* fails to tell us that Abraham "walked with God," as had Enoch and Noah, or to suggest any reason for the patriarch's journey. And when *J* commences his main narrative, Abraham does not know what his destination is to be. We are told only that he has been called, without prior preparation or warning. The opening words are. "Go forth," thus keynoting the theme of migration from Mesopotamia in quest of spiritual values. There could be no way more apt or direct to signal the commencement of the biblical process.

Nor could there be much preparation or warning in the circumstances. As a drastic departure from existing norms, the concept of monotheism had to break new ground. There had to be a first time, and place, and person or group of persons; hence the abruptness of the account in Gen xii. The time has been circumscribed for us by the background data which the patriarchal narratives incorporate. The place is indicated in three ways; the Mesopotamian source of the material involved; the need for a new and different religious solution, a need that could be discerned in Mesopotamia more clearly than anywhere else, as we have seen; and the manifold ties that link Israel to the homeland of the patriarchs. The human factor cannot be reduced independently to a given individual or group of individuals. But tradition has nominated Abraham specifically, and

that choice is not contradicted by modern study. Furthermore, the author of the narrative about Abraham's call did not get his information from a researcher's files. And he could not have obtained it from cuneiform texts since, even if his scholarship matched his literary genius, the documents from the pertinent period had by *J*'s time been covered up for centuries, and were to remain buried for nearly three thousand years more. *J* could have gotten his material only from earlier Israelite traditions, which in turn reached back all the way to patriarchal times. That is why the Genesis narrative about the turning point in Abraham's life, favored as it is by the internal evidence from biblical history and the indirect testimony of extra-biblical sources, deserves more than casual attention.

The end result of that religious experience of faraway and long ago cannot be estimated even at this late date, for the end is not yet in sight. From just such a start a society was fashioned, and its continued quest for universal verities inspired three enduring religions, which profoundly affected all subsequent history. As the record of that progressive quest, the Bible became and has remained a factor in cultural life and an influence in world literature.

But if the full results cannot be calculated, an impression of their magnitude may perhaps be suggested by means of indirect comparison. The question has often been posed whether the course of recent history would have changed much if on August 15, 1769, Letizia Bonaparte had given birth to a girl instead of a boy. The answer is obvious when limited to decades. But would it still be true a hundred years later, or a hundred and fifty? The chances are that it would not, and that the deviation from the original course which the advent of Napoleon brought about would have been righted in due time.

Now let us ask the same kind of question about the biblical process and its presumed originator. The answer can be ventured with much greater confidence because the measuring span is twenty times as long. That distant event altered history irrevocably. In the case of Napoleon, the detour rejoined the main road. But in the case of Abraham, the detour became itself the main road.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF GENESIS

NATURE OF THE CONTENTS

In terms of subject matter, the Book of Genesis breaks up into two distinct and unequal parts. The first contains chapters i-xi; it is restricted—if allowances are made for the Table of Nations—to what has come to be known as Primeval History. The second part, chapters xii-l, takes up the Story of the Patriarchs.

The following discussion will include some material that has already been cited, or will come up later in the comments on the pertinent sections. Such data need to be brought together under this heading because of their special relevance to the present context.

(1) *Primeval History*

The break between Primeval History and the Story of the Patriarchs (Parts I and II in this book) is sharper than is immediately apparent. On the surface, the end of chapter xi appears to lead up to the next chapter. Actually, however, the call that set Abraham's mission on its course, and with it the biblical process as a whole (xii 1 ff.), is received without any prior warning, as was stressed above. Everything that precedes is a broadly conceived preface, a prelude to the particular story with which the rest of the Pentateuch is concerned. The difference is underscored by the scope of the two subdivisions of Genesis. The patriarchal narratives take up four-fifths of the entire book, yet they cover only four generations of a single family. Primeval History, on the other hand, has the whole world as its stage, and its time span reaches back all the way to Creation. In other words, Primeval History seeks to give a universal setting for what is to be the early history of one particular people.

Although the content of the prefatory part is thus in effect prehistoric, it could still have originated with Israelites, or been imported from some outside quarter or quarters. In this instance, it can be established that (1) the material was imported for the most part, and (2) that the ultimate source of the borrowings or adaptations can be traced to a single land. The originating center has left its geographic stamp, so to speak, in some cases, and indirect but just as decisive markers in others.

Let us first list the headings of the thirteen sections into which the first eleven chapters of Genesis have been arranged in this work; the respective documentary sources are given in parentheses: 1. Opening Account of Creation (*P*). 2. The Story of Eden (*J*). 3. The Fall of Man (*J*). 4. Cain and Abel (*J*). 5. The Line of Cain (*J*). 6. The Patriarchs before the Flood (*P*). 7. Prelude to Disaster (*J*). 8. The Flood (*J, P*). 9. Blessing and Covenant (*P*). 10. Noah and his Sons (*J, P*). 11. The Table of Nations (*P, J*). 12. The Tower of Babel (*J*). 13. Genealogies from Shem to Abraham (*P, J*).

In Sections 2 (Tigris and Euphrates), 11 (Nimrod's lands and cities), 12 (Babylon), and 13 (Ur, Haran), Mesopotamia is designated explicitly. In Sections 6 (antediluvian lists) and 8 (Flood) there is a demonstrable relationship with abundant cuneiform sources. Section 7 echoes concepts of theogony which are ultimately traceable to Mesopotamia. And the remaining topics likewise fall into line by reason of such marked details as Eden or the Flood. In other words, Primeval History is clearly oriented toward Mesopotamia.

One of the significant aspects of this situation is that *P* incorporated outside material, in so far as Primeval History is concerned, no less than *J*. It should be stressed, moreover, that *P* did not utilize *J*'s material in these particular instances. *P*'s account of Creation is fundamentally different from *J*'s, but it shows a far-reaching correspondence in detail with the Babylonian account of Creation as presented in *Enūma eliš* (see COMMENT on Sec. 1). The same holds true of *P*'s approach to antediluvian generations (cf. COMMENT on Sec. 6). It follows, accordingly, that *P* had independent access to traditions that ultimately originated in Mesopotamia. This has a bearing, in turn, on the essential antiquity of at least some of *P*'s data; and it should warn us against discounting *P* when pre-documentary traditions are considered.

Another aspect of the derivative character of Primeval History

also deserves careful attention. Native traditions are homogeneous by definition. The themes they feature are bound to reflect local concepts and beliefs; and the language in which such themes have been transmitted lends itself readily to restatement by the eventual chroniclers. It is different, however, with outside motifs which have been taken over for one reason or another. The background is alien, the subject matter is fixed, and the form and expression are inevitably influenced by the original medium. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that a certain degree of dissonance can be detected when Primeval History is compared with native material in the Bible, as is the case, for example, with the mythological content of Section 7, and such passages as iii 22 ff. and xi 6; or that the story about Eden should contain, aside from the theme itself, such Sumerian loanwords as the term Eden or the word for "flow" (*'ēd*, see Sec. 2). In such cases, the writer was restricted by his source material in more ways than one. Small wonder, therefore, that various critics have found difficulty in recognizing *J*'s hand in these sections of Genesis. But their consequent recourse to other sources (*E*, and even the more speculative *L* and *S*) has proved to be so much tilting at windmills. It is still unmistakably *J*, but a *J* operating under particularly rigid limitations.

Lastly, the fact that the account of Creation was secondary in much of its detail has an important bearing on the "scientific" aspect of the narrative. It means that the data embody Mesopotamian conclusions on the subject, conclusions that had been reached at a remote age by a society which was a pioneer in the gradual advance of science. In this respect, biblical thought reflected the best that was available in contemporary scientific thinking, yet raised such data to its own theological standards. It is a case of authenticity in the second degree, that is, an authentic reflex of an underlying source. And the basic question about any statement in a given source is not whether that statement is true or false, but what it means (cf. concluding COMMENT on Sec. 1).

How is one to evaluate such manifold dependence of Primeval History on Mesopotamian prototypes? One attempted answer can be found in the tenets of a school that sprang up at the beginning of the century under the aegis of the distinguished German Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch. In his lectures under the collective title of "Babel and Bibel," Delitzsch drew sharp attention to the Babylonian ingredient in Genesis, and went on to conclude that the

Bible was therefore guilty of crass plagiarism. Ironically enough, the accuser could not know at the time how much more fuel for his theory subsequent discoveries might seem to provide, but that, paradoxically, the increment would refute the theory itself by placing the whole subject in its true perspective.

The added material has demonstrated, among other things, that the background of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis is indeed authentic, so much so in fact that it could have been obtained only in Mesopotamia itself. Accordingly, the traditions about the patriarchs are right in naming that country as the homeland of Abraham. In that case, however, Abraham and the people he led could hardly have remained untouched by the rich culture of the land from which they migrated. They were bound to be influenced by various local customs and practices, and we know now that such was actually the case. In addition, they must have been familiar with the themes that dominated the literature of Mesopotamia. Nor need all such ties have been severed as a result of Abraham's departure. We are told that Jacob had the opportunity to renew them over a period of twenty years. And similar contacts may have been maintained by later generations. In other words, there is nothing surprising about the fact that early Hebrew literature is replete with Mesopotamian motifs, especially motifs relating to pre-Israelite times. It is only lack of such themes that would be grounds for suspicion.

Delitzsch and his followers failed to take due notice of the fact that the Bible never denied the close ties between the patriarchs and Mesopotamia. And they overlooked the further significant fact that there was a spiritual reason for the parting of the ways. The migration, as we have seen, was in protest against the local religious solution. And reflections of that protest can still be detected throughout the account on Primeval History. *P*'s statement about Creation differs from its Mesopotamian analogue by its overriding concept of an omnipotent Creator. *J*'s version of the Flood receives a moral motivation. Most revealing of all is the same writer's narrative about the Tower of Babel. The scene of the episode is Babylon itself, and some passages in that story read as though the author had had the Babylonian prototype before him. Yet the purpose of the tale is not a direct though unacknowledged transcript, but a stern criticism of the builders' monumental presumption. To reverse a familiar saying, the more things are alike in some ways, the greater the differences between them on other counts.

There is, finally, yet another question about Primeval History that remains to be considered. Why was this sketchy introduction included altogether? The career of a given nation is not traced back automatically to Creation, especially when even that nation's forefathers are presented as relative newcomers on the stage of history. The logical beginning in this instance would seem to be Gen xii, or perhaps a few verses earlier. And in fact, the *E* source does not reach back beyond Abraham, unless one ascribes this late start to accidents of preservation rather than deliberate design.

The answer to this question may be sought in the fact that neither *J* nor *P* was interested in national history as such. Rather, both were concerned with the story of a society and, more particularly, a society as the embodiment of an ideal, that is, a way of life. A history of that kind transcends national boundaries and may conceivably be retraced to the beginnings of the world. Such at least is the manifest intent of *P*, whose system is designed to close any possible genealogical gaps.

Nevertheless, one should not discount another potential reason for the grand preface. Mesopotamian literature was fond of taking many of its themes all the way back to Creation, sometimes even in matters of no great consequence.¹³ Understandably enough, this tendency was especially prominent in historical writings. Thus the standard Sumerian king list starts with the dynasties before the Flood,¹⁴ and proceeds from there to eras with which the compiler was better acquainted. We know that the same approach was followed elsewhere in the Near East.¹⁵ Moreover, *P*'s genealogies before the Flood parallel the antediluvian dynasties of the Sumerians in endowing individuals with enormous life-spans; and the names of some of the biblical patriarchs before the Flood display Akkadian formation (see Sec. 6). It would have been no less natural for *J*, who frequently incorporated Mesopotamian data in his own contribution to Primeval History, to follow time-honored precedent in prefacing his work with sketches about the early stages of mankind

¹³ Even a simple incantation against toothache is honored with such a cosmic introduction; cf. ANET, p. 100.

¹⁴ See Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, 1939.

¹⁵ There is, for example, an Old Hurrian text about world rulers starting with primeval times; cf. J. Friedrich, *Kleinasiatische Sprachdenkmäler*, 1932, p. 35.

as a whole. If the Mesopotamian models were not the sole reason for such an arrangement, they could well have been a contributing factor.

(2) *The Story of the Patriarchs*

The patriarchal narratives in Genesis comprise three major subdivisions: A. The Story of Abraham (xii 1–xxv 18); B. The Story of Jacob (xxv 19–xxxvii 2a); C. Joseph and His Brothers (xxxvii 2b–l 26). What happened to Isaac? Strange as it may seem, Abraham's son and successor does not appear to have inspired a separate cycle of narratives about himself. The death of Abraham is recorded in xxv 8–10. Verses 12–18 are devoted to Ishmael and his descendants. Verse 19 proceeds immediately to Isaac's descendants, and the birth of Jacob and Esau is recorded in 21ff., thus introducing the story of Jacob. Chapter xxvi, to be sure, gathers a number of scattered notices about Isaac. Yet the very fact that these notices are disconnected and meager demonstrates how inconspicuous was the role that Isaac played in the story of the patriarchs as a whole. It is further evident from chapter xxiv that Isaac could not have been a memorable personality.

The story of Abraham contains a secondary theme in the sporadic references to Lot. A companion of the patriarch ever since the migration from Mesopotamia, Lot eventually parts from his uncle and settles in the Jordan Plain where he becomes an eyewitness to the upheaval that wiped out Sodom and the region about it. The Lot narrative comes to a close with the births of the eponymous ancestors of the Moabites and the Ammonites. A unique section within the cycle of narratives about Abraham is chapter xiv, which stands out from the rest by virtue of its distinctive orientation, and provides a picture of the patriarch as viewed from the outside.

The Jacob story is more diversified in its pattern than that of Abraham. Its protagonist lacks his grandfather's stability, and that lack, which heightens the dramatic impact of the story, is brought out primarily through the medium of the continuous rivalry between Jacob and his twin brother Esau. Jacob's flight to Haran turns into twenty years of penance in Mesopotamia, and terminates in an equally hasty return to Canaan. The long stay in Mesopotamia is portrayed against a background of authenticated local conditions.

Significantly, both *J* and *E* prove to have drawn on original data for their respective accounts of this stage in Jacob's life.

Two episodes are recounted in the latter half of Genesis which are nearly as extraneous to their particular contexts as was Gen xiv in the first half. Unlike Gen xiv, however, the authorship of the accounts in question is not a serious problem; each betrays the hand of *J*. One of these later narratives is chapter xxxiv, which centers about Jacob's daughter Dinah; it goes chronologically with the Jacob cycle, and Jacob himself becomes personally involved. The other narrative is chapter xxxviii, which deals with the incident of Judah and Tamar; it happens to be technically a part of the Joseph story, which is introduced in chapter xxxvii. Nevertheless, it has nothing whatever to do with Joseph, and the Judah whom we meet here cannot be synchronized with the Judah of the Joseph story (see COMMENT on xxxviii). The two accounts will be considered here jointly because of their common deviation from the main cycles into which they have been inserted in the text.

The name Dinah occurs twice outside ch. xxxiv, namely, in xxx 21 and xlv 15; but those passages are textually suspect; they appear to be afterthoughts, which is another term for glosses. This does not mean, of course, that Dinah had no place in the older traditions; it does suggest, however, that notices about Dinah were not part of the main themes with which biblical historians were concerned. Now the story that Gen xxxiv tells about her relates to a very early stage in Hebrew history, which culminated in a clash between the tribes of Simeon and Levi on the one hand, and the city of Shechem on the other. Whatever the immediate results, the long-term effect was ruinous for the two tribes, inasmuch as Simeon was eventually reduced to an insignificant role, while Levi lost its tribal status altogether. Israel looked back on the incident in stern reproof (cf. xlix 5–7).

Gen xxxviii shows no awareness of Judah's presence in Egypt, while displaying a keen interest in the early history of the tribe of Judah. In common, thus, with xxxiv, the narrative under discussion affords an independent and different insight into early historical conditions. *J* was apparently in no position to ignore either of these side views, although he must have been aware of the resulting discrepancies in chronology as regards Judah. One could only wish that both *J* and *E* had had reason to incorporate other such notices, which no doubt must have been current; we would then have had a

broader basis for the reconstruction of a dimly illuminated age. But, as stated above, the biblical narrators were interested primarily in recording a progressive spiritual experience; and one can hardly blame them for their preference.

The Joseph story calls for no special comment at this time. As has just been pointed out, chapter xxxviii, although now placed within the Joseph cycle, is not pertinent to it in content. The same is true of the Testament of Jacob (xlix 1) (see COMMENT on Sec. 61). Another intrusive passage in the Joseph story is the list in xlii 8-27 (P); cf. COMMENT *ad loc.* The last Hebrew word in the Book of Genesis reads "in Egypt," a fitting, though doubtless unintended, catchword which points to the Book of Exodus.

GENESIS EXEGESIS

Over the many centuries that have elapsed since its definitive compilation, Genesis has proved to be by far the most popular book of the Pentateuch, attracting the greatest amount of attention and giving rise to the largest volume of comment. The variety and universal appeal of its contents and the literary quality of its narratives are one reason for this continuous interest. Another reason, of course, lies in the manifold challenge that Genesis has always presented to philosophers and theologians. As a result, references to Genesis began to appear in the later books of the Bible itself, only to swell into an ever-increasing flow of opinions and studies as time went by. The modern age has provided a new stimulus through the dual medium of biblical criticism and archaeology. By now the total extent of publications on the subject is probably beyond computation. The chances are that a latter-day Ecclesiastes would repeat his predecessor's complaint that "of making many books there is no end," but would apply this saying exclusively to the extant material on Genesis.

The following is a sample listing of works, both ancient and modern, that relate in varying degrees to the interpretation of the Book of Genesis. In many instances, the given entry is but one of a number that would have been included if space permitted. The immense periodical literature had to be ignored altogether. Nor is this the place to take up translations as such; that subject will be dealt with in the next section.

Among the oldest works pertaining to Genesis, or at least in-

spired by the canonical version, are two components of the Pseudepigrapha, both dating from the second century B.C. They are the *Book of Jubilees*, originally written in Hebrew and purporting to be an elaboration of the biblical book; and *Testaments of the XII Patriarchs*, originally composed in Aramaic. Another Aramaic composition is the so-called *Genesis Apocryphon* (abbr. Gen. Apocr.), one of the recently recovered Dead Sea scrolls (published by N. Avigad and Y. Yadin, 1956). More systematic in method and approach is a work by the Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who was born toward the end of the pre-Christian era. In his comprehensive Greek study on the Pentateuch which bore the title "Questions and Solutions," Philo paid a great deal of attention to Genesis, inasmuch as the extant material points to at least six books on this subject alone.

Rabbinic literature is replete with references and allusions to Genesis themes. The haggadic (morally instructive) legends on the subject have been collected in L. Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols., 1913-38. A special midrashic (expository) collection on Genesis is the subject of a large work entitled *Bereshit Rabba*. Representative of many early studies by the Church Fathers is the Commentary on Genesis by the great third-century scholar Origen.

Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages produced various biblical studies—lexicographical, grammatical, and exegetical. The pioneer in this effort was Sa'adia (882-942), who is still celebrated for his translation of the Pentateuch into Arabic; but he was also the author of an Arabic commentary on Gen i-xxviii 7, which unfortunately is extant only in fragments. We do have, however, the complete Arabic commentary by Sa'adia's Karaite (literalist) opponent 'Ali ben Sulaiman (tenth/eleventh centuries) published by S. Skoss, 1928. Of the numerous mediaeval commentaries in Hebrew, the best known, and still useful in many respects, are those of Rashi (eleventh century) and Abraham Ibn Ezra (twelfth century).

We have to skip the next few stages, with their groping for an objective approach to the Bible and the evolution of critical methods, and turn to recent works. The classic formulation of the documentary hypothesis, embracing the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets, is still J. Wellhausen's *Die Composition des Hexateuchs* . . . , 1889. For subsequent statements see D. C. Simpson, *Pentateuchal Criticism*, 1924, and especially M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuchs*, 2d ed., 1948. Representative of the large number of Introduc-

tions to the Old Testament are those by S. R. Driver, 10th ed., 1900, R. H. Pfeiffer, 1941, and J. L. McKenzie, 1956. For a special, and elaborate, application of the documentary method to the first book of the Pentateuch, cf. O. Eissfeldt, *Die Genesis der Genesis*, 1958. The views of Y. Kaufmann, as expressed in his monumental Hebrew study on *The Religion of Israel*, may now be gleaned from the English abridgment by M. Greenberg, 1960.

Of the many distinguished commentaries on Genesis published since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, I can only list those that I had occasion to consult frequently. They include A. Dillmann's *Die Genesis*, 6th ed., 1892, which is notable for its sound philological approach, H. Gunkel's *Genesis*, 1902, marked by the author's keen appreciation of literary quality, and S. R. Driver's (abbr. Dr.) *The Book of Genesis* (12th ed., 1926, repr. 1954). The abiding popularity of this last work is a well-deserved tribute to the author's rare combination of learning, lucidity, and plain common sense. But the book was published originally in 1904, and effective revisions were interrupted by Driver's death in 1914. A convenient digest of the textual apparatus is available in J. Skinner's treatment of Genesis in the *International Critical Commentary*, 1910, 2d ed., 1930. Within the past decade there have appeared, among others, U. Cassuto's *From Adam to Noah* (Gen i-v) and *From Noah to Abraham* (Gen vi-xi), both in Hebrew (1953); R. de Vaux's *La Genèse*, as part of *La Sainte Bible* (abbr. SB), 1953; and G. von Rad's (abbr. von Rad) *Das erste Buch Mose*, 1952-53; the recently published English translation of this thoughtful study substitutes the RSV version of the Hebrew text.

As examples of sectional commentaries on Genesis, I cite in addition to Cassuto's, above (which was intended to cover the entire book), only K. Budde's *Biblische Urgeschichte* (Gen i-xii 5, 1883) and W. Zimmerli's *Die Urgeschichte: I. Mose 1-11* (2d ed., 1957). J. H. Kroeze's (Dutch) *Genesis Veertien* ("Genesis XIV"), 1937, may serve as an illustration of still more restricted monographic studies.

When it comes to insight into biblical usage, there is nothing that can match A. B. Ehrlich's (abbr. Ehrl.) *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel*, Vol. I, 1908 (for Genesis, pp. 1-256). The text of the Hebrew Bible itself is by no means as firmly established as the commonly applied term "Masoretic" (traditional) would seem to imply. The recorded variants, however, are of minor technical significance.

For all general purposes, R. Kittel's edition of Genesis in the same editor's *Biblia Hebraica*, 3d ed., 1937, is fully adequate.

Finally, Israel, as the nation that produced the Bible, was not an island either in space or in time. Hence there is a virtually inexhaustible commentary on the Bible that can be distilled from the literary remains of Israel's contemporaries. For Genesis, the material is spread over a maze of cuneiform documents, echoed in a scattering of West Semitic inscriptions, and implicit in some of the records from Egypt. The fundamental importance of Assyriological sources has been manifest ever since the publication of G. Smith's *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*, 1880; and it received more recent recognition in A. Heidel's *The Babylonian Genesis*, 1945, 2d ed., 1951, and *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 1946. The West Semitic inscriptions, in so far as they may bear on Genesis times, have yet to be excerpted in a separate book; on the independent area of Ugaritic studies, cf. M. H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 1955. For the latest evaluation of the meager Egyptological material we have J. Vergote's (abbr. Vergote) *Joseph en Egypte*, 1959. A collection of outside sources pertaining to the Hebrew Bible as a whole is presented in a large volume on *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (abbr. ANET), edited by J. B. Pritchard, 2d ed., 1955. But fresh material keeps on turning up all the time, and much more extensive screening will be required in the future.

ON TRANSLATING GENESIS

The main task of a translator is to keep faith with two different masters, one at the source and the other at the receiving end. The terms and thoughts of the original, the impact of sound and phrase, the nuances of meaning, and the shadings of emphasis should all be transposed from one medium into another without leaving any outward sign of the transfer. It is, of course, an ideal goal, one that can never be attained with complete success. Yet the translator must strive to approximate this ideal. If he is unduly swayed by the original, and substitutes word for word rather than idiom for idiom, he is traducing what he should be translating, to the detriment of both source and target. And if he veers too far in the opposite direction, by favoring the second medium at the expense of the first, the result

is a paraphrase. The task is an exacting one even with contemporary or relatively recent sources. With ancient sources, the difficulties are compounded as problems of text, usage, and cultural setting increase progressively with age.

The Old Testament shares many such problems with other literary works of comparable antiquity; but it also presents to the modern translator a number of obstacles that are not found elsewhere. Genesis, for example, is itself a stratified book. It was compiled sometime before the middle of the first millennium B.C., after a long period of growth and composition. But the extant manuscripts of Genesis as a whole are many centuries later, so that much could have happened, and some things are actually known to have occurred, after the definitive compilation. In marked contrast, the stele of Hammurabi is still, except for one excised portion, the monument that the legislator ordered.

Far more problematic than the integrity of the text is the accuracy of the transmitted meaning. On this count, Genesis has been vulnerable to a greater degree than any other book of the Bible, since Genesis reaches back to the patriarchal period and contains a substantial amount of authentic material from that age; hence there was ample opportunity for meanings to be lost or mislaid even before the time of compilation. Moreover, later Hebrew usage is by no means identical with early biblical usage. Yet successive interpreters would tend to make the secondary usage retroactive. And because the Bible had become sacred Scripture, such anachronistic interpretations acquired a normative bearing of their own. Thus in course of time the content of the Bible became enveloped in layer after layer of superimposed interpretation; interpretations bequeathed by scribes and Rabbis, ancient versions, the vocalizers of the standard (Masoretic) text, and—not the least formidable of all—the first standard version in the given Western tongue. Each of these accretions has served as a safeguard in some ways, but as a barrier in others, a barrier to the recovery of the original context. The translator of the Bible has to work his way through these successive incrustations, grateful for what each has safeguarded, but wary of their heterogeneous matter. As one gentle critic put it, with tongue in cheek, translations are so much more enjoyable than originals, because they contain many things that the originals leave out. The translator of the Bible must try to avoid such spurious improvements, new or old.

The starting point, naturally, is the received text. Sooner or later the question is bound to arise whether a given passage has been correctly transmitted. On the whole, the textual condition of Genesis is much better than that of a number of other books of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, Genesis has its complement of textual distortions. Some are manifestly late and easily corrected with the help of parallel passages elsewhere in the Bible, the ancient versions, or a combination of both. Thus the received reading *Dōdānīm* in x 4 can be restored to *Rōdānīm* thanks to I Chron i 7 as well as LXX; the letters *R* and *D* are easily and often confused in the standard Hebrew script. The mangled names in xlv 21 can be reconstructed with the assistance of Num xxvi 38f. and I Chron viii 4f. At times, the solution is more roundabout, but not seriously in doubt; this is true, for example, of Gen x 10 ("all of them" for "Calneh"), or the whole of Gen xlix 26. In other instances, an obvious omission can be safely restored from a primary ancient version, usually LXX; cf. xlvii 5f.

There remains, however, a handful of passages that are obviously wrong as transmitted, yet cannot be righted by any of the means at our disposal. Invariably, these are instances about which the earliest versions and interpreters were already in doubt; the parade example is the "Shiloh" passage in xlix 10c. In such cases—they are fewer than is generally assumed—I deemed it best to adhere to the text, at least in its consonantal form, while relegating possible remedies to the footnotes. If an emendation is to be accorded preferential status, sound methodology requires that it have the balance of the argument in its favor; in other words, to be adopted, an emendation ought to be immediately appealing (as is true of "Calneh" in x 10). Elsewhere, the text is in a better position than the emender to bear the onus of uncertainty; and indeed, incidental discoveries have more than once vindicated a biblical text and refuted modern critics. In strictly technical studies, obstinate cruxes are often left untranslated.

Before we touch briefly on questions of meaning, a comment should be made about the division of the biblical text into chapters and verses; such breaks often affect the syntax of the given passage one way or another. The Masoretic division into verses was slow to solidify, and was not accomplished until the turn of the ninth century of the present era. The division into chapters is still later and non-Masoretic; it was introduced by Christian scholars in the thir-

teenth century,¹⁸ that is, almost two millennia after the Book of Genesis had been compiled. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the now familiar breakdown into chapters and verses does not always accord with the internal evidence of the content. In Genesis, the first chapter should have continued through ii 4a, ending in the middle of what is now marked as a verse; similarly, the beginning of the Joseph story, which surely ought to have been signalized by a new chapter, is now found inside xxxvii 2. Inappropriate verse breaks are naturally more common; note, for example, i 1-3, vi 1/2, xxiii 5/6, 14/15, 17/18. Sometimes, the wrong break occurs in the middle of a word, an echo of a distant period when punctuation was sporadic or non-existent. An example of such a mishap will be found at the juncture of xlix 20 and 21, where we now have "heel: *From* Asher" instead of "*their* heel: Asher" (the border letter *M*, depending on its position, can yield either "from" or "their"). Fortunately, such misdivided words are rare in the text of the Old Testament as a whole.

To go back to the recovery and transfer of meaning, the modern translator of Genesis—and other books of the Old Testament—has to mediate between two sovereign linguistic entities, each with its distinctive equipment developed over a long period of time. The differences are not only chronological but also structural and cultural. In transposing an ancient source, the ultimate task is to translate not just a text but a civilization. In the present instance, the respective media are early biblical Hebrew and modern English. Frequently, it is not a case of a one-to-one correlation; the desired balance has to be achieved indirectly, whether the point at issue is one of construction, semantic range, or idiomatic expression. It should be useful, therefore, to give a few representative illustrations, as proof that a faithful translation is by no means the same thing as a literal rendering; similar lists could, of course, be adduced for any two unrelated languages. Some of the examples cited below have often been commented on before; others have not received adequate recognition.

(1) *The particle wa*. The most common meaning of this ubiquitous particle is "and." But *wa* (usually reduced to *w*^e) may also introduce a subordinate clause ("while," xx 1), and then mark the main clause (xx 2; note also i 3: "God said," or "then God said"). It can also be

¹⁸ Cf. Pfeiffer, *Introduction* . . . , pp. 101 ff., 200 f.

adversative ("but, however"), explicative ("namely, that is"), or a connective in a hendiadys (see below). At the beginning of a sentence, and particularly of a paragraph, section, or book, the translational equivalent of *wa* is zero. A good illustration of various uses of *wa* is to be found in i 14b, where the particle occurs four times, but each time with a different force: (a) introductory; (b) connective in hendiadys; (c) explicative; (d) plain connective. The relatively literal Authorized Version (KJ) reads: "*and* let them be for signs *and* for seasons, *and* for days *and* years" (italics added). The present translation offers: "let them mark the fixed times, (namely) the days and the years." Aside from the four "and"s, the literal rendering obscures the underlying meaning of two significant details; see the discussion *ad loc*.

(2) *Differences in semantic capacity*. Terms that correspond at the core may differ widely in their later coverage. Hence a given verb or noun in biblical Hebrew may require various English counterparts and, conversely, more than one Hebrew term may best be rendered by the same English word. The Hebrew stem 'mr coincides by and large with the English verb "to say." But the Hebrew verb in question carries many other nuances: *to tell, promise, threaten, express fear, reflect* (speak to oneself), and the like. A uniform translation would result not only in monotony but also in under-representation. Much the same applies to Heb. yd', basically "to know," but secondarily also "to recognize, learn, experience." Mechanical transposition has saddled English, as distinct from other Western languages, with the far from self-explanatory euphemism "man knew woman" (cf. iv 1). Similar deficits result from our slavish "to hear, to sin, to remember" for the given Hebrew verbs.

The same holds true of translations of Hebrew nouns. Thus, for example, Heb. *zera'*, primarily "seed," lends itself to several derivative connotations. In xxxviii 8f. this noun occurs three times with as many distinct and significant shadings. KJ reproduces it each time as "seed." But the context calls for, and usage justifies, "*line—seed—offspring*" respectively.

(3) *Flexible idioms*. The Hebrew phrase which means literally "to find favor/grace in one's eyes" often becomes meaningless in rigid translations. An impression of its wealth of nuances may be gathered from the following: "But Noah *found favor* with Yahweh" (vi 8); "if I may *beg* of you this *favor*" (xviii 3); "in the hope of *gaining your favor*" (xxxiii 8); "please, *indulge me*" (xxxiii 15);

"he took a fancy to" (xxxix 4); "we are *thankful* to my lord" (xlvii 25). A similar case in point is "to lift one's head," a phrase that is used, deliberately and with telling effect, in three widely differing applications within the same narrative (ch. xl): "Pharaoh will *par-don* you" (13); Pharaoh "will *lift off* your *head*" (19); "he *singled out*" (20). Another good example of elusive idiomatic usage is provided by the prepositional phrase *lipnē*, normally "before," either in space or in time. But there is a residue of occurrences, several of them in Genesis, in which "before" makes little if any sense on closer examination; yet this is the translation that is invariably offered. What meaning could an objective reader wrest from a phrase (in x 8) like "Nimrod was a mighty hunter *before* Yahweh (the Lord)"? But when all the pertinent instances are viewed jointly, a common pattern emerges. The term refers to something that happened with one's approval (cf. our "countenanced by"; the literal meaning of the Hebrew is "to the face of"), or at one's behest. Thus x 8b becomes "a mighty hunter *by the will* of Yahweh; xvii 18 yields "Let but Ishmael thrive *if you so will it*"; in xxvii 7 we find "that I may . . . bless you *with* Yahweh's *approval* before I die" (not "*before* Yahweh *before* I die"); and in xliii 33 we obtain the meaningful "they took their seats *at his direction*" instead of "*be-fore him*" (which does not suit the context in any case). Many similar examples of demonstrable idiomatic usage are scattered throughout Genesis.

(4) *Rare verbal forms*. There are two specialized verbal forms in biblical Hebrew which the grammars underestimate or ignore altogether. One is exactly like the Hebrew causative (or Hiphil) in formation, but sharply different in meaning, inasmuch as it is intransitive and does not, therefore, take a direct object; it imparts to the stem a durative or superlative connotation. Thus the forbidden tree in Eden was not "to be desired to make one wise" (no object is expressed in the text), but "attractive as a means to (lasting) wisdom" (iii 6); in vi 19 we are told that the animals were to be taken into the ark not "to keep them alive" (again no object is indicated, hence KJ italicizes the pronoun), but to "stay alive"; in the sense "to quicken," biblical Hebrew would normally use here the Piel conjugation. In describing the birth of Benjamin (xxxv 16 f.), the narrative first tells us that Rachel "had hard labor" (Piel), and then marks the climax by saying "when her labor was at its hardest . . ." (Hiphil). The standard translations offer: "and she

had hard labor. And it came to pass when she was in hard labor. . . ." Not only do such renderings ignore the difference in conjugations but they miss the climax as well; and many commentators homogenize the verbs by repointing the second occurrence so as to make it agree with the first, thereby compounding the offense. Another case in point is "you shall excel no more" (xlix 4). This time nobody could make the Hiphil causative; but many conscientious critics would repoint the alleged misfit to yield "you shall not survive"!

The other specialized verbal form is outwardly the so-called Hithpael, except that it is neither passive nor reflexive, as Hithpael should be. What we have in such cases is an old Semitic form, which is durative or iterative in connotation, and has formally coalesced with the Hithpael. One example of this type is a derivative of the stem for "to go," with the meaning of "walk about" (which is a prolonged or iterative activity): it is used of Enoch (v 22, 24) and Noah (vi 9), both of whom "walked with God"; cf. also xiii 17. Another common example is the stem meaning "to mourn," which is again something that lasts a long time. In xxiv 21 the same formation is used most appropriately to express "(the man) stood gaping (at her)," as opposed to a fleeting glance.

(5) *Differing modes of definition*. Biblical Hebrew and modern English have similar means of reference, but they do not always distribute them in the same way. For instance, Hebrew may use the definite article where English prefers the possessive pronoun: e.g., Heb. "*the* young men": Eng. "*my* men" (xiv 24); Heb. "*the* flock": Eng. "*my* flock" (xxxviii 17); and conversely, Heb. "*my* covenant between me and you": Eng. "*the* covenant between you and me" (xvii 7); similarly, Heb. "the men of *her* place": Eng. "the men of *that* place" (xxxviii 21). Just so, Hebrew will often employ the personal pronoun, where English requires or prefers the personal name (e.g., xxix 14), and vice versa.

(6) *Replies to questions*. Since biblical Hebrew lacks a term for "yes," it indicates an affirmative reply by repeating the question without the interrogative particle. A good example is xxix 6. To Jacob's question "Is he well?" the shepherds' reply is literally "Well" (note that the text does not say "He is well"); to reflect the mood of that occasion, we have to say "He is."

(7) *Inversion*. Both Hebrew and English employ inversion of the normal word order as a method of achieving some significant modifi-

cation of meaning. But since the results are not parallel, it would not do merely to transfer the device automatically; neither can the usage be ignored with impunity. Hence the effect of inversion in Hebrew must often be reflected in English by some indirect means. For instance, xxx 40 is a parade example of separating the sheep from the goats. The goats have just been dealt with in the preceding verse. Accordingly, the sequel must read, "The ewes, *on the other hand*, . . ."; the italicized phrase is not in the text in so many words, but its semantic equivalent is plainly indicated just the same.

(8) *Hendiadys*. This is a method whereby two formally coordinate terms—verbs, nouns, or adjectives—joined by "and" express a single concept in which one of the components defines the other. The usage was especially common in Greek, hence the term for it ("one by means of two"). Nor is it entirely a stranger to colloquial, if not literary, English. The statement "I am good and mad" would be a solecism on the face of it, since one is not apt to be both kind and angry at one and the same time; what this phrase means is "I am very angry."

The point of this digression is to call attention to the fact that hendiadys was also well known to biblical Hebrew, far more so than is generally recognized. Sometimes, the added nuance is a minor one, so that failure to notice it is not necessarily damaging. In xii 1, for example, we have "Go forth from *your native land*," not "Get thee out of *thy country*, and from *thy kindred*" (KJ); and the favorite Hebrew expression *hesed we'met* is not "mercy and truth" (KJ), or "steadfast love and faithfulness" (RSV; cf. xxiv 27 and seq.), but simply "steadfast (*met*) kindness (*hesed*)"; in these compounds, or what amounts to compounds, the order of the constituents is immaterial.

There are times, however, when failure to heed a hendiadys results in an illogical or distorted rendition. In iii 16, Eve is told literally, "I will multiply greatly your pain and your conception" (cf. KJ), with the logical order seemingly reversed. The hendiadys, however, yields "pangs in childbearing" (cf. RSV). In xlv 6 the text appears to say, "there will be neither plowing nor harvest," and is so invariably rendered. Yet no farmer will abstain from plowing because there has been a famine; on the contrary, he will try that much harder. What the hendiadys conveys is "there shall be no yield from tilling."

Many other categories of this kind could be cited. But the foregoing sampling should suffice to warn the reader and vindicate the translator.

STANDARD VERSIONS

This section, which brings the Introduction to a close, will be limited to two widely separated sets of Old Testament translations, namely, ancient versions, and translations into English. In both instances the survey will have to be sketchy and selective.

The old versions to be reviewed are the ones that bear a direct relationship to the Hebrew text. Secondary translations based on the Septuagint need not detain us here. But no such survey can ignore the Samaritan Pentateuch (abbr. Sam.), although strictly speaking this is not a version but a recension.

The Samaritan Bible does not go beyond the Pentateuch, because that was the only part of the Old Testament that had been actually canonized by the time of the Samaritan schism (ca. 400 B.C.). Accordingly, Sam. did not participate in any subsequent Masoretic developments, and thus became a valuable witness of relatively early textual conditions. There are some six thousand cases throughout the Pentateuch in which Sam. differs from the received text. In about one-third of these, Sam. has the support of LXX. This means that both Sam. and LXX made independent use of common earlier traditions. Far more significant, however, is the overwhelming agreement with the central Masoretic body of material. While some of the readings were as yet fluid, by far the bulk of the material had firmed sufficiently, as early as the year 400, to leave scant room for departures within the evolving branches. This is another way of saying that the Torah had already become a book sacred to all concerned.

Aside from predictable sectarian interpretations and frequent orthographic variants, the residual differences between the Samaritan and the Masoretic texts of Genesis are relatively few. Sam., in common with the *Book of Jubilees*, assigns shorter life-spans to some of the patriarchs before the Flood (ch. v); but it increases the distance between the birth of Arpachshad and the birth of Abraham (ch. xi) from 290 to 940 years. More significant, because of their antiquity, are Sam.'s readings in certain narrative passages, especially where the Masoretic text is obviously defective. Thus Sam.

supplies (in agreement with LXX and other versions) the missing clause "Let us go outside" in iv 8; in x 4, Sam. reads correctly *Dōdānīm* for *Rōdānīm*; and in xxii 13 it offers "a (literally 'one') ram" for "a ram behind" (reading 'hD for 'hR; the Masoretic text reflects the same mechanical confusion of D for R as in the previous example). The over-all crop (of which this is but a sampling) may not be large; but the value of the Samaritan recension lies not so much in what it corrects as in what it attests.

Because it bears not only on the text but, more especially, on its meaning, the first extant translation of Genesis is bound to be of exceptional importance. That pioneering role belongs to the oldest Greek version, which is known as the Septuagint (LXX); the Penta-teuchal part of it goes back to the third century B.C. The subject as a whole is much too rich and complex to be compressed into a brief outline; for a comprehensive treatment, see H. B. Swete's *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, 2d ed., 1914. Several aspects of the LXX, however, deserve to be stressed in the present context. For one thing, the translators were Alexandrian Jews who approached their task with reverence and were intent primarily on making biblical tradition accessible to a community that was no longer at home in Hebrew. The principal aim of LXX was thus to conserve, and not to change or correct; hence the results reflect neither independent scholarship nor extensive editorializing, but tradition transposed into another linguistic medium. For another thing, however, all disagreements between LXX and the Masoretic text, in spite of the relative antiquity of the former, are not to be adjudged automatically in favor of the Greek version. Such departures may be due to any of a number of factors. For instance, the Samaritan recension has demonstrated that on various points tradition was as yet fluid; in some cases, the data behind the Masoretic text have proved to be superior to those that LXX utilized, while in other cases the translators were on firmer ground. It is worth noting in this connection that not only the Samaritan text but also material from the Dead Sea caves often supports the Septuagint. And for yet another thing, many of the existing differences from the received text are due to inner-Greek processes; the recovery of the original text of LXX is still far from accomplished. In sum, each given instance must be judged by itself and on its own merits.

The Septuagint version was to be but one of several early Greek translations. At least three others appeared within the space of a

few centuries, namely, the new and mutually contrasted translations by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. Of these efforts, Aquila's is the most curious and, indirectly, also the most valuable. As a relative of Emperor Hadrian, Aquila knew his Greek very well. But subsequent to his conversion to Judaism, his fidelity to the Hebrew text became extreme, so much so that Aquila came to be known as "a slave to the letter." In the third century, the great Christian scholar Origen arranged all four Greek versions in parallel columns, along with the Hebrew text and its transliteration into Greek script. The entire work, called Hexapla because of its six-column arrangement, was a product of precise scholarship as well as immense industry. Unfortunately, only fragments of the Hexapla have survived.

Jewish translations into Aramaic are extant in several versions. The most extensive of these is Targum Onkelos (TO), which dates from the second century of the present era. Although some sections are paraphrased, and anthropomorphisms are shunned throughout, TO is for the most part a literal rendering of the Hebrew embodying not only long-established rabbinical traditions but also a great deal of valuable philological lore. There are also fragments of other Palestinian recensions in Aramaic (TP), and of an extensive periphrastic rendition erroneously attributed to an otherwise unspecified Jonathan (TJ). A Christian translation into Syriac (a subdivision of Aramaic) bears the name of Peshitta. This version (Syr.) is based in part on the Hebrew text and in part on LXX.

Finally, the standard Latin version or Vulgate (Vulg.) is a tribute to the scholarship and devotion of Jerome (late fourth and early fifth centuries). In his task, Jerome utilized, in varying degrees, the translation of LXX, the so-called Old Latin version which was based on LXX, the Hexapla of Origen, and the underlying Hebrew text in the light of contemporary rabbinical exegesis. The Vulgate is thus a rich mine of information; and it remains the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

Passing now to English versions of the Bible, is it proper to describe more than one such translation as standard? Should not this term be reserved for the Authorized Version of 1611, more commonly known as the King James Bible (KJ)? The question is not entirely academic. It is an inescapable fact, for instance, that all subsequent English translations of the Bible, which go back to the original and not, say, to the Vulgate, are loyal revisions of KJ or re-

spectful dissenters from it—a tribute either way to the pre-eminent position of the Authorized Version. Here, however, the term “standard” is not intended to carry a normative connotation; it is used not comparatively but quantitatively, to designate certain major efforts.

The King James Bible has been described as “the noblest monument of English prose.” If one amends this to read “the most influential work in the English language,” the statement would be valid beyond the remotest shadow of doubt. The influence of the King James Bible on life and letters in the English-speaking world has been all-pervasive. The reported comment of one late discoverer, “It is such an interesting book: there are so many quotations in it,” is an excellent—though no doubt apocryphal—summary of the situation.

But success on such an unprecedented scale can lead to loss of perspective. When one distinguished literary critic recently described KJ as “probably the greatest translation ever made,” he was laying claim to broader literary and technical knowledge than any individual could possibly command. KJ is the product of a singularly happy stage in the history of English. It was achieved, moreover, by men who showed great sensitivity in their handling of the original media—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The translators had the further advantage of invaluable spadework by gifted predecessors, especially the martyred William Tyndale. It was a matchless combination of assets, and the result was a truly inspired version, destined for extraordinary influence and acclaim.

All translations, however, are but arrested pursuits of the given source. In each case the chase halts with the publication of the version. But the target does not remain stationary, unless the subject itself is static so that no further progress is possible. With regard to the Bible, the flow of information has never ceased. The King James Version could not go beyond the knowledge and insights of its own age. Yet we have learned more about a book like Genesis in the subsequent 350 years than had been gleaned in the preceding twenty centuries—more indeed in the last 50 years than in any comparable period since the Pentateuch was canonized. In other words, the gap between KJ and its target has been widening constantly and at a steadily accelerating pace.

Relatively few lay readers of the Bible are able to make a first-hand comparison between their favorite translation and the origi-

nal. With a version that possesses the outstanding appeal of the King James Bible, it is not surprising that many of its users should dismiss the original as an unwelcome intruder. Substantive departures from KJ are apt to be resented as so many wanton desecrations. The fact, say, that “the valley of the shadow of death” is an old distortion of the actual text is immaterial to those who have come to cherish the eerie image; and who wants to give up Joseph’s “coat of many colors,” even though the chromatic effect is illusory? It is almost as if the Psalmist, or Jacob, should have consulted the translators, instead of the other way about. Nevertheless, beyond the interest in any given Bible translation looms the attraction of the original source. For it was the source that inspired the hundreds of versions, ancient and recent, and enabled each of them to shine with refracted glory—not just the King James Bible, but also Luther’s older translation into German (1534), and the many similar achievements in other European countries. The constant striving for improved translations is not motivated by mere pedantry; it is stimulated, in the final analysis, by the hope that each new insight may bring us that much closer to the secret of the Bible’s universal and enduring appeal. This alone would be reason enough for the growing number of revisions and new translations, in various languages, with all the toll in energy and treasure that such efforts entail.

Recent increase in these activities in English may be judged from the following partial listing of Old Testament versions. Revisions of the King James Bible include the *English Revised Version* (1885), the *American Revised Version* (1901), the *Holy Scriptures*, issued by the Jewish Publication Society (JPS, 1917), and the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV, 1952). Less hampered by ties to the Authorized Version of 1611 are James Moffatt’s *The Old Testament* (1922); *The Old Testament: An American Translation* (AT, 1931); and the revised translation by the Jewish Publication Society, *The Torah*, 1962. The same should be true of the forthcoming Old Testament section of the *New English Bible*. And one should note the Catholic Confraternity Version.

It is no accident that all but one of these versions fall within the present century, and that several are either the product of the past decade or are still in preparation. The stepped-up pace of translational effort is but an index of the swelling flow of discovery. Desire to keep up with changing English usage has been a relatively minor factor. It is not the language of this or that version of the Bible

that has needed revising, but the underlying image of the biblical age, as reflected in the text, the grammar, the lexicon, and—above all—in the enormous volume of new material on the ancient Near East as a whole.

The translation which is offered in the present work was handicapped by fewer obstacles than "standard" versions normally face. Concentration on a single book of the Bible automatically limits the range of problems. An individual can venture solutions from which a collective body might be expected to shrink. And the addition of extensive notes and comments affords ample opportunity to justify a seemingly far-fetched rendition.

But no biblical version nowadays can be anything else than stuff for transforming. All that a modern translator can hope for is to have progressed here and there beyond his innumerable predecessors, each of whom has had some share in the search. As long as a single pertinent tablet or ostrakon remains underground, or has gone unheeded, there can be no definitive translation of a book of the Bible.

I. PRIMEVAL HISTORY

1. OPENING ACCOUNT OF CREATION

(i 1–ii 4a: P)

I ¹When God set about to create heaven and earth—²the world being then a formless waste, with darkness over the seas and only an awesome wind sweeping over the water—³God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. ⁴God was pleased with the light that he saw, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and he called the darkness Night. Thus evening came, and morning—first day.

⁶God said, “Let there be an expanse in the middle of the water to form a division between the waters.” ^aAnd it was so. ⁷God made the expanse, and it divided the water below it from the water above it. ^b ⁸God called the expanse Sky. Thus evening came, and morning—second day.

⁹God said, “Let the water beneath the sky be gathered into a single area, that the dry land may be visible.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and he called the gathered waters Seas. God was pleased with what he saw, ¹¹and he said, “Let the earth burst forth with growth: plants that bear seed, and ^cevery kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it.” And it was so. ¹²The earth produced growth: various kinds of seed-bearing plants, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with seed in it. And God was pleased with what he saw. ¹³Thus evening came, and morning—third day.

¹⁴God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky, to distinguish between day and night; let them mark the fixed

^{a-a} So LXX; transposed in MT to the end of vs. 7.

^b Heb. “expanse” (twice).

^c So several manuscripts and most ancient versions; omitted in MT.

times, the days and the years, ¹⁵ and serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth. And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the great lights, the greater one to dominate the day and the lesser one to dominate the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, ¹⁸ to dominate the day and the night, and to distinguish between light and darkness. And God was pleased with what he saw. ¹⁹ Thus evening came, and morning—fourth day.

²⁰ God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." ²¹ And it was so. ²² God created the great sea monsters, every kind of crawling creature with which the waters teem, and all kinds of winged birds. And God was pleased with what he saw. ²³ God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase; fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on earth." ²⁴ Thus evening came, and morning—fifth day.

²⁵ God said, "Let the earth bring forth various kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of every kind." And it was so. ²⁶ God made various kinds of wild animals, cattle of every kind, and all the creeping things of the earth, whatever their kind. And God was pleased with what he saw.

²⁷ Then God said, "I will make man in my image, after my likeness; let him subject the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, the cattle and all the wild [animals],¹ and all the creatures that creep on earth."

²⁸ And God Created man in his image;
In the divine image created he him,
Male and female created he them.

²⁹ God blessed them, saying to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and subdue it; subject the fishes of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that move on earth." ³⁰ God further said, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on earth and every tree in which is the seed-bearing fruit of the tree;

^{a-d} Restored from LXX.

^e See NOTE.

^f See NOTE.

³¹ And to all the animals on land, all the birds of the sky, and all the living creatures that crawl on earth [I give] all the green plants as their food." And it was so. ³² God looked at everything that he had made and found it very pleasing. Thus evening came, and morning—sixth day.

II ¹ Now the heaven and the earth were completed, and all their company. ² On the seventh^e day God brought to a close the work that he had been doing, and he ceased on the seventh day from all the work that he had undertaken. ³ God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he ceased from all the work which he had undertaken.

⁴ Such is the story of heaven and earth as they were created.

NOTES

i 1. On the introductory phrase see COMMENT.

2. The parenthetic character of this verse is confirmed by the syntax of Heb. A normal consecutive statement would have begun with *wattēhī hā'āreš*, not *wēhā'āreš hāyētā*.

a formless waste. The Heb. pair *tōhū wā-bōhū* is an excellent example of hendiadys, that is, two terms connected by "and" and forming a unit in which one member is used to qualify the other; cf., for example, vs. 14, iii 16, xlv 6. Here "unformed-and-void" is used to describe "a formless waste."

an awesome wind. Heb. *ruah* means primarily "wind, breeze," secondarily "breath," and thus ultimately "spirit." But the last connotation is more concrete than abstract; in the present context, moreover, it appears to be out of place—see H. M. Orlinsky, JQR 47 (1957), 174–82. The appended *'elōhīm* can be either possessive ("of/from God"), or adjectival ("divine, supernatural, awesome"; but not simply "mighty"); cf. xxx 8.

sweeping. The same stem is used in Deut xxxii 11 of eagles in relation to their young. The Ugaritic cognate describes a form of motion as opposed to a state of suspension or rest.

4. *was pleased with [what] he saw*. This phrase, which serves as a formal refrain, means literally "saw that it was good," or rather "saw how good it was" (cf. W. F. Albright, *Mélanges Robert*, 1956, pp. 22–26); but Heb. "good" has a broader range than its English equivalent.

5. *came*. Literally "was, came to be"; Heb. repeats the verb with "morning." The evening marks the first half of the full day.

^e See NOTE.

first day. In Semitic (notably in Akkadian, cf. Gilg., Tablet XI, lines 215 ff.) the normal ordinal series is "one, second, third," etc., not "first, second, third," etc.; cf. also ii 11.

6. *expanse.* Traditionally "firmament," one of the Bible's indirect contributions to Western lexicons. It goes back to the Vulg. *firmamentum* "something made solid," which is based in turn on the LXX rendering of Heb. *rāqīa'* "beaten out, stamped" (as of metal), suggesting a thin sheet stretched out to form the vault of the sky (cf. Dr.).

And it was so. This clause is correctly reproduced here by LXX but misplaced in Heb. at the end of vs. 7. The present account employs it normally after each of God's statements; cf. vss. 9, 11, 15, 24, 30, and textual note *a-a*.

9. *area.* Literally "place," Heb. cons. *maqom*, for which LXX reads *mqwh* "gathering," the same as in vs. 10, perhaps rightly (cf. D. N. Freedman, *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 64 [1953], 190 f.).

14. *let them mark the fixed times.* Heb. literally "let them be for signs and for seasons (and for days and for years)," which has been reproduced mechanically in most translations (most recently RSV). Some of the moderns (e.g., von Rad, SB), realizing that signs do not belong in this list, take the first connective particle as explicative: they shall serve as signs, that is, for seasons, and days, and years; but the sun and the moon cannot be said to determine the seasons proper; moreover, the order would then be unbalanced (one would expect: days, seasons, years). The problem solves itself once we take the first pair as a hendiadys (cf. vs. 2): they shall serve a sign for the fixed time periods, or in other words, they shall mark the fixed times, that is, the days and the years. The use of the particle (Heb. *w^e/ū*) in each of these functions (hendiadys, explicative, connective) is amply attested elsewhere.

15. *lights.* Heb. *m^eōrōt*, differentiated from *m^eōrōt* in vs. 14, literally "sources of light, luminaries."

20. The creation of the fifth day was deemed to comprise creatures (Heb. *nepeš*) that might appear in swarms (*šereš*) in the water, on the ground, or in the air. But their ultimate breeding place was traced to the waters, since land creatures come under the sixth day. The process is described indirectly: let the waters teem with . . . (stem *šrṣ*, with cognate accusative).

21. The same Heb. stem (*rmš*) is used for "crawl" (as in this instance) and "creep" (as in 24 ff.). The underlying sense, however (which is shared by the Akk. cognate *namāšu*), is "to have locomotion"; cf. vs. 28, vii 21, ix 2. And just as Heb. *remeš* is contrasted here with

larger animals in 24 ff., so, too, in Gilg. (Tablet I, column ii, lines 40 ff.) the small creatures of the steppe (Akk. *namaššu*) are juxtaposed to the larger beasts.

24. Heb. *bēhēmā* "cattle" covers here the domestic animals in general, or animals due to be domesticated.

26. For the singulars "my image, my likeness" Heb. employs here plural possessives, which most translations reproduce. Yet no other divine being has been mentioned; and the very next verse uses the singular throughout; cf. also ii 7. The point at issue, therefore, is one of grammar alone, without a direct bearing on the meaning. It so happens that the common Heb. term for "God," namely, Elohīm (**ēlōhīm*) is plural in form and is so construed at times (e.g., xx 13, xxxv 7, etc.). Here God refers to himself, which may account for the more formal construction in the plural.

wild [animals]. Reading [*hyt*] *h'rṣ* as in vs. 25.

28. *move.* Same Heb. verb as for "creep"; see NOTE on vs. 21.

30. [*I give*]. In Heb. the predicate may carry over from 29; but the translation has to repeat it for clarity.

ii 1. The relatively recent division into chapters, which dates from medieval times, disturbs in this case the inner unity of the account. In vs. 4, below, the much older division into verses proves to be equally misleading.

company. Heb. *šābā'* generally stands for "army, host," but this is by no means the original meaning of the term; the basic sense of the stem is "to be engaged in group service" (cf. Exod xxxviii 8; I Sam ii 22; Isa xxix 7, 8). The cognate Akk. noun *šābu* denotes not only "soldier," but also "member of a work gang, laborer." The Heb. term is collective; in the present context it designates the total made up of the various component parts in the planned design of creation; hence array, ranks, company.

2. Since the task of creation was finished on the sixth day, the text can hardly go on to say that God concluded it on the seventh day. It follows therefore that (a) the numeral is an error for "sixth," as assumed by LXX, Sam., and other ancient versions; (b) the pertinent verb is to be interpreted as a pluperfect: God had finished on the sixth day and rested on the seventh; or (c) the verb carries some more particular shade of meaning. The present translation inclines to the last choice. Under circumstances that are similar in kind if not in degree, Akk. employs the verb *šutešbû* in the sense of "inspect and approve"; this is applied to the work of craftsmen (masons in the Code of Hammurabi 233) and even to the birth of Marduk (ANET, p. 62, line 91). In this account, God inspects the results of each successive act and finds them

pleasing. The end result could well be described as work "brought to a (gratifying) close." A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, p. 127, proposes "declared finished," which appears to point in the same direction.

4. *story*. Heb. *tōl'dōt*, traditionally "generations" in the etymological sense of "begettings," that is, "genealogy, line" in modern usage (cf. NOTE on vs. 1); hence the derived meaning "history," or more simply "story," as in the present context.

COMMENT

This opening statement about the creation of the world is assigned by nearly all critics to the *P*(riestly) source. There is a marked difference between the present section and the accounts that follow, accounts which most scholars regard as typical of the *J* source. Although the subject matter is roughly parallel in both instances, there is scarcely any similarity in general treatment or specific emphasis. No less noteworthy is the stylistic contrast between the respective sections, which cannot be ignored even in translation, as the subsequent chapters will show. The version before us displays, aside from *P*'s characteristic vocabulary, a style that is impersonal, formulaic, and measured to the point of austerity. What we have here is not primarily a description of events or a reflection of a unique experience. Rather, we are given the barest statement of a sequence of facts resulting from the fiat of the supreme and absolute master of the universe. Yet the account has a grandeur and a dramatic impact all its own.

The stark simplicity of this introductory section is thus by no means a mark of meager writing ability. It is the result of special cultivation, a process in which each detail was refined through endless probing and each word subjected to minutest scrutiny. By the same token, the end product cannot have been the work of an individual, but must be attributed to a school with a continuous tradition behind it. The ultimate objective was to set forth, in a manner that must not presume in any way to edit the achievement of the Creator—by the slightest injection of sentiment or personality—not a theory but a credo, a credo untinged by the least hint of speculation.

In these circumstances, the question that immediately arises—one that is necessarily more acute here than in nearly any other

context—is the basic question that has to be raised about any statement in a given source; and this is not whether the statement is true or false, but what it means (R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 1946, p. 260). In other words, the point here is not whether this account of creation conforms to the scientific data of today, but what it meant to, and how it was arrived at by, the writer concerned. It is on this score, among many others, that the results of recent discovery and research afford us the means for an improved perspective.

Genesis i–xi in general, and the first section in particular, are a broad introduction to the history which commences with Abraham. The practice of tracing history back to antediluvian times is at least as old as the Sumerian king list (see above, p. LVII). Biblical tradition had ample reason to be familiar with Mesopotamian cultural norms. Indeed, the Primeval History is largely Mesopotamian in substance, implicitly for the most part, but also explicitly in such instances as the Garden of Eden or the Tower of Babel. Thus biblical authors were indebted to Mesopotamian models for these early chapters not only in matters of arrangement but also in some of the subject matter.

Is the treatment of creation in Genesis a case of such indebtedness? We have two separate accounts of this theme, the present section which stems from *P*, and the one following which goes back to *J*, as was indicated above. Yet neither source could have borrowed directly from the other, since each dwells on different details. Accordingly, both must derive from a body of antecedent traditions. It follows that the present version of *P* should have connections with old Mesopotamian material. This premise is borne out of actual facts.

Mesopotamia's canonical version of cosmic origins is found in the so-called Babylonian Creation Epic, or *Enūma eliš* "When on High" (ANET, pp. 60–72). The numerous points of contact between it and the opening section of Genesis have long been noted. There is not only a striking correspondence in various details, but—what is even more significant—the order of events is the same, which is enough to preclude any likelihood of coincidence. The relationship is duly recognized by all informed students, no matter how orthodox their personal beliefs may be. I cite as an example the tabulation given by Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, p. 129:

*Enūma elish**Genesis*

Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal	Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it
Primeval chaos; Ti'amat enveloped in darkness	The earth a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep (<i>tēhōm</i>)
Light emanating from the gods	Light created
The creation of the firmament	The creation of the firmament
The creation of dry land	The creation of dry land
The creation of luminaries	The creation of luminaries
The creation of man	The creation of man
The gods rest and celebrate	God rests and sanctifies the seventh day

Except for incidental differences of opinion in regard to the exact meaning of the first entry in each column (see below, and cf. NOTE on vs. 2), the validity of this listing is not open to question. What, then, are the conclusions that may be drawn from these and other relevant data?

It is clear that the biblical approach to creation as reflected in *P* is closely related to traditional Mesopotamian beliefs. It may be safely posited, moreover, that the Babylonians did not take over these views from the Hebrews, since the cuneiform accounts—among which *Enūma elish* is but one, and a relatively stereotyped, formulation—antedate in substance the biblical statements on the subject. Nor is there the slightest basis in fact for assuming some unidentified ultimate source from which both the Mesopotamians and the Hebrews could have derived their views about creation. It would thus appear that *P*'s opening account goes back to Babylonian prototypes, and it is immaterial whether the transmission was accomplished directly or through some intermediate channel; in any case, *J* cannot have served as a link in this particular instance.

The date of the take-over cannot be determined within any practical limits. Although much in *P* is demonstrably late, there is also early material in that same source. The Primeval History in particular was bound to make use of old data. At the same time, however, a distinction must be made between basic subject matter and its final form in the collective version. The creation account could have en-

tered the stream of biblical tradition sometime in the latter half of the second millennium, without taking final shape until a number of centuries later. In the present connection, however, the question of date is a relatively minor one. Of far greater importance are (1) the established borrowing of the general version of creation, and (2) the ultimate setting into which biblical tradition incorporated the received account.

Derivation from Mesopotamia in this instance means no more and no less than that on the subject of creation biblical tradition aligned itself with the traditional tenets of Babylonian "science." The reasons should not be far to seek. For one thing, Mesopotamia's achievements in that field were highly advanced, respected, and influential. And for another, the patriarchs constituted a direct link between early Hebrews and Mesopotamia, and the cultural effects of that start persisted long thereafter.

In ancient times, however, science often blended into religion; and the two could not be separated in such issues as cosmogony and the origin of man. To that extent, therefore, "scientific" conclusions were bound to be guided by underlying religious beliefs. And since the religion of the Hebrews diverged sharply from Mesopotamian norms, we should expect a corresponding departure in regard to beliefs about creation. This expectation is fully borne out. While we have before us incontestable similarities in detail, the difference in over-all approach is no less prominent. The Babylonian creation story features a succession of various rival deities. The biblical version, on the other hand, is dominated by the monotheistic concept in the absolute sense of the term. Thus the two are both genetically related and yet poles apart. In common with other portions of the Primeval History, the biblical account of creation displays at one and the same time a recognition of pertinent Babylonian sources as well as a critical position toward them.

Such in brief is the present application of the precept that when faced with a statement in a significant source—and especially a statement about such matters as creation—we ask first what the statement means, before we consider whether it is true or false from the vantage point of another age.

It remains to discuss, in passing, the structure of the introductory verses of this section, since their syntax determines the meaning, and the precise meaning of this passage happens to be of far-reach-

ing significance. The problem could not be fully elucidated in the NOTES, which is why it is being considered here.

The first word of Genesis, and hence the first word in the Hebrew Bible as a unit, is vocalized as *b'rē'šit*. Grammatically, this is evidently in the construct state, that is, the first of two connected forms which jointly yield a possessive compound. Thus the sense of this particular initial term is, or should be, "At the beginning of . . .," or "When," and not "In/At the beginning"; the absolute form with adverbial connotation would be *bārē'šit*. As the text is now vocalized, therefore, the Hebrew Bible starts out with a dependent clause.

The second word in Hebrew, and hence the end-form of the indicated possessive compound, appears as *bārā'*, literally "he created." The normal way of saying "at the beginning of creation (by God)" would be *b'rē'šit b'rō' ('lōhīm)*, with the infinitive in the second position; and this is indeed the precise construction (though not the wording) of the corresponding phrase in ii 4b. Nevertheless, Hebrew usage permits a finite verb in this position; cf. Hos i 2. It is worth noting that the majority of medieval Hebrew commentators and grammarians, not to mention many moderns, could see no objection to viewing Gen i 1 as a dependent clause.

Nevertheless, vocalization alone should not be the decisive factor in this instance. For it could be (and has been) argued that the vocalized text is relatively late and should not therefore be unduly binding. A more valid argument, however, is furnished by the syntax of the entire first paragraph. A closer examination reveals that vs. 2 is a parenthetic clause: "the earth being then a formless waste . . .," with the main clause coming in vs. 3. The structure of the whole sentence is thus schematically as follows: "(¹)When . . . (²)—at which time . . . —(³)then . . ." Significantly enough, the analogous account (by *J*) in ii 4b–7 shows the identical construction, with vss. 5–6 constituting a circumstantial description. Perhaps more important still, the related, and probably normative, arrangement at the beginning of *Enūma eliš* exhibits exactly the same kind of structure: dependent temporal clause (lines 1–2); parenthetic clauses (3–8); main clause (9). Thus grammar, context, and parallels point uniformly in one and the same direction.

There is more to this question, of course, than mere linguistic niceties. If the first sentence states that "In the beginning God created heaven and earth," what ensued was chaos (vs. 2) which needed immediate attention. In other words, the Creator would be

charged with an inadequate initial performance, unless one takes the whole of vs. 1 as a general title, contrary to established biblical practice. To be sure, the present interpretation precludes the view that the creation accounts in Genesis say nothing about coexistent matter. The question, however, is not the ultimate truth about cosmogony, but only the exact meaning of the Genesis passages which deal with the subject. On this score, at least, the biblical writers repeat the Babylonian formulation, perhaps without full awareness of the theological and philosophical implications. At all events, the text should be allowed to speak for itself.

2. THE STORY OF EDEN

(ii 4b-24: J)

II 4b At the time when God Yahweh made earth and heaven—
5 no shrub of the field being yet in the earth and no grains of the field having sprouted, for God Yahweh had not sent rain upon the earth and no man was there to till the soil; 6 instead, a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the soil—7 God Yahweh formed man^a from clods in the soil^b and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus man became a living being.

8 God Yahweh planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground God Yahweh caused to grow various trees that were a delight to the eye and good for eating, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

10 A river rises in Eden to water the garden; outside, it forms four separate branch streams. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 The gold of that land is choice; there is bdellium there, and lapis lazuli. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that winds through all the land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris; it is the one that flows east of Asshur. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 God Yahweh took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to till and tend it. 16 And God Yahweh commanded the man, saying, "You are free to eat of any tree of the garden,

^a MT 'ādām.

^b Heb. 'ādāmā, in assonance with 'ādām.

ii 4b-24

15

17 except only the tree of knowledge of good and bad, of which you are not to eat. For the moment you eat of it, you shall be doomed to death."

18 God Yahweh said, "It is not right that man should be alone. I will make him an aid fit for him." 19 So God Yahweh formed out of the soil various wild beasts and birds of the sky and brought them to the man to see what he called them; whatever the man would call a living creature, that was to be its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, all^c birds of the sky, and all wild beasts; yet none proved to be the aid that would be fit for man.^d

21 Then God Yahweh cast a deep sleep upon the man and, when he was asleep, he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. 22 And God Yahweh fashioned into a woman the rib that he had removed from the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 Said the man,

This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.
She shall be called Woman,^e for she was taken from Man.^f

24 Thus it is that man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

^c So several manuscripts and ancient versions; MT omits.

^d MT "Adam."

^e Heb. 'iššā.

^f Heb. ṭš, in assonance with 'iššā.

NOTES

ii 4b. *At the time when*. Literally "on the day when"; Heb. *b'yōm*, cognate with Akk. *enūma*, the opening word of the Babylonian Genesis (*Enūma eliš*).

God Yahweh. Although this combination is the rule in ii 4b-iii 24, it is found only once in the rest of the Pentateuch (Exod ix 30). Critical opinion inclines to the assumption that the original version used "Yahweh" throughout, in conformance with J's normal practice, the other component being added later under the influence of the opening account (by P). One cannot, however, discount the possibility that these

personal name of a deity with a determinative for "god," except that such a qualifier would follow the name in Hebrew rather than precede it.

The personal name itself has come down in the consonantal text (*K^ethib*) as YHWH. The vocalized text (*Q^{re}*) has equipped this form with the vowels *‘-ō-ā*, thus calling for the reading *‘dōnāy* "Lord" (the difference between the initial vowels is secondary). The reluctance to pronounce the personal name, which is not yet reflected in the consonantal sources but is already attested in LXX, is directly traceable to the Third Commandment (Exod xx 7; Deut v 11), which says actually, "You shall not swear falsely by the name of Yahweh your God," but has been misinterpreted to mean "You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain." Lev xxiv 16 deals with an entirely different issue (specifically, an insult to Yahweh)

5. In *‘ādām* "man" and *‘ādāmā* "soil, ground" there is an obvious play on words, a practice which the Bible shares with other ancient literatures. This should not, however, be mistaken for mere punning. Names were regarded not only as labels but also as symbols, magical keys as it were to the nature and essence of the given being or thing (cf. vs. 19). The writer or speaker who resorted to "popular etymologies" was not interested in derivation as such. The closest approach in English to the juxtaposition of the Hebrew nouns before us might be "earthling: earth."

6. *flow*. Heb. *‘ēd*, apparently Akk. *edû* (Sum loanword), cf. my note in BASOR 140 (1955), 9 ff.; for a slightly different view see W. F. Albright, JBL 58 (1939), 102 f. The sense would be that of an underground swell, a common motif in Akkadian literary compositions. The only other occurrence of the term, Job xxxvi 27, "mist" or the like, need signify no more than the eventual literary application of this rare word.

7. *clods*. The traditional "dust" is hard to part with, yet it is inappropriate. Heb. *‘āpār* stands for "lumps of earth, soil, dirt" as well as the resulting particles of "dust." For the former, cf., for example, xxvi 15; note also vs. 19, where the animals are said to have been formed "out of the soil." On the other hand, "dust" is preferable in iii 19.

8. *Eden*. Heb. *‘ēden*, Akk. *edinu*, based on Sum. *eden* "plain, steppe." The term is used here clearly as a geographical designation, which came to be associated, naturally enough, with the homonymous but unrelated Heb. noun for "enjoyment."

in the east. Not "from"; the preposition (Heb. *min*) is not only participative but also locative.

9. See iii 5.

10-14. On the general question of the Rivers of Eden see COMMENT.

10. *rises in*. Not the traditional "went out of" (wrong tense), nor

even "comes out of, issues from," since the garden itself is in Eden. Hence, too,

outside. Heb. literally "from there," in the sense of "beyond it," for which cf. I Sam x 3. What this means is that, before reaching Eden, the river consists of four separate branches. Accordingly,

branch streams. In Heb. the mouth of the river is called "end" (Josh xv 5, xviii 19); hence the plural of *rō‘š* "head" must refer here to the upper course (Ehrl.). This latter usage is well attested for the Akk. cognate *rēšu*.

11. *winds through*. The customary "compasses, encircles" yields a needlessly artificial picture. The pertinent Heb. stem *sbb* means not only "to circle" but also "to pursue a roundabout course, to twist and turn" (cf. II Kings iii 9), and this is surely an apt description of a meandering stream.

Havilah. There was evidently more than one place, as well as tribe, by that name (Dr., pp. 119, 131).

12. *lapis lazuli*. For this tentative identification of Heb. *‘eben haššoham*, cf. my discussion "The Rivers of Paradise" in *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich*, 1959, pp. 480 f.

14. *Tigris*. This modern form is based on the Greek approximation to the native name, which appears as (*I*)*digna* in Sumerian, *Idiqlat* in Akkadian, *Ḫiddeqel* in Hebrew, *Deqlat* in Aramaic, and *Dijlat* in Arabic.

Asshur. Elsewhere in Heb., either the land of Assyria or its eponymous capital. Here evidently the latter; the Tigris flows east of the city of Ashur, but it never constituted the entire eastern border between Assyria and Babylonia (Cush).

16. *you are free to eat*. Or "you may eat freely." Heb. employs here the so-called "infinitive absolute" construction, in which the pertinent Heb. form is preceded by its infinitive. The resulting phrase is a flexible utterance capable of conveying various shades of meaning; cf. next vs.

17. *the moment*. Heb. literally "on the day"; cf. 4b.

you shall be doomed to death. Another infinitive absolute in Hebrew. The phrase need not be translated "you shall surely die," as it invariably is. Death did not result in this instance. The point of the whole narrative is apparently man's ultimate punishment rather than instantaneous death.

18. *an aid fit for him*. The traditional "help meet for him" is adequate, but subject to confusion, as may be seen from our "helpmate," which is based on this very passage. The Heb. complement means literally "alongside him," i.e., "corresponding to him."

19. *a living creature*. In this position this phrase does violence to Heb. syntax, it could well be a later gloss.

20. *proved to be*. Traditionally "was found to be." In this construction, however, the Heb. stem *ms'* usually means "to suffice, reach, be adequate" (Ehrl.), as is true also of its cognates in Akkadian and Aramaic.

21. *at that spot*. Heb. literally "underneath it," or "instead of it," with the idiomatic sense of "then and there."

22. *to the man*. In Heb. the defined form *hā'ādām* is "man," the undefined *'ādām*, "Adam," since a personal name cannot take the definite article. With prepositions like *le-* "to," the article is elided and only the vowel marks the difference between "to Adam" (*le'ādām*) and "to the man" (*lā'ādām*), so that the consonantal text is bound to be ambiguous (*lām* in either case). Since the form without preposition appears invariably as *hā'ādām* in ii–iii (the undefined form occurs first in iv 25), and is not mentioned until the naming of Adam v 2, the vocalized "to Adam" (also vs. 20, iii 17) is an anachronism. In iii, LXX favors "Adam" even in the presence of the consonantal article.

23. The assonance of Heb. *'is* and *'iššā* has no etymological basis. It is another instance of symbolic play on words, except that the phonetic similarity this time is closer than usual. By an interesting coincidence, Eng. "woman" (derived from "wife of man") would offer a better linguistic foil than the Heb. noun.

COMMENT

The brief Eden interlude (ii 4b–iii 24) has been the subject of an enormous literature so far, with no end in sight. One study alone takes up over 600 pages (cf. the comment by J. L. McKenzie, "The Literary Characteristics of Genesis 2–3," *Theological Studies* 15 [1954], 541–72). Here there is room for only a few paragraphs.

The account before us deals with the origin of life on earth, as contrasted with the preceding statement about the origin of the universe as a whole. The contrast is immediately apparent from the respective initial sentences. The first account starts out with the creation of "heaven and earth" (i 1). The present narrative begins with the making of "earth and heaven" (ii 4b). The difference is by no means accidental. In the other instance the center of the stage was heaven, and man was but an item in a cosmic sequence of majestic acts. Here the earth is paramount and man the center of interest; indeed, an earthy and vividly personal approach is one of the out-

standing characteristics of the whole account. This far-reaching divergence in basic philosophy would alone be sufficient to warn the reader that two separate sources appear to be involved, one heaven-centered and the other earth-centered. The dichotomy is further supported by differences in phraseology (e.g., "create" : "make") and in references to the Deity ("God" : "God Yahweh"); and the contrast is sustained in further pertinent passages. In short, there are ample grounds for recognizing the hand of *P* in the preceding statement, as against that of *J* in the present narrative.

Yet despite the difference in approach, emphasis, and hence also in authorship, the fact remains that the subject matter is ultimately the same in both versions. We have seen that the *P* version, for its part, derived much of its detail from Mesopotamian traditions about the beginnings of the world. The account by *J* points in the same direction, as is immediately apparent from the following comparison of opening lines:

"At the time when God Yahweh made earth and heaven—"

(ii 4b)

"When God set about to create heaven and earth—" (i 1)

"When on high heaven had not been named,

Firm ground below had not been called by name—" (ANET, pp. 61 f., I, lines 1 f.).

In each case the temporal clause leads up to a parenthetical description, and is then resumed with the proper sequel. Thus, however much *J*, *P*, and their Mesopotamian sources may differ ultimately from one another, they are also tied to common traditions.

That *J* incorporated Mesopotamian data in his treatment of the origin of man—most of which, incidentally, are missing in *P*—is shown by much more compelling evidence than the mere agreement of initial clauses. To begin with, the narrative before us features two telltale loanwords. One is the word for "flow" (vs. 6), Akk. *edū*, from Sum. *a.dé.a* (see NOTE *ad loc.*). The other is the geographical term "Eden" (cf. NOTE on vs. 8), Akk. *edinu*, Sum. *eden*, which is especially significant in that this word is rare in Akk. but exceedingly common in Sum., thus certifying the ultimate source as very ancient indeed. The traditions involved must go back, therefore, to the oldest cultural stratum of Mesopotamia.

Next comes the evidence from the location of Eden which is furnished by the notices about the rivers of that region. Recent data on the subject demonstrate that the physical background of the tale

is authentic (see the writer's "The Rivers of Paradise," *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich*, pp. 473-85). All four streams once converged, or were believed to have done so, near the head of the Persian Gulf, to create a rich garden land to which local religion and literature alike looked back as the land of the blessed. And while the Pishon and the Gihon stand for lesser streams, which have been Hebraized into something like "the Gusher" and "the Bubbler" respectively, the Tigris and the Euphrates leave no doubt in any case as to the assumed locale of the Garden of Eden. The chaotic geography of ancient and modern exponents of this biblical text can be traced largely to two factors. One is the mistaken identification of the land of Cush in vs. 13 (and in x 8) with the homonymous biblical term for Ethiopia, rather than with the country of the Kassites; note the spelling *Kuššû* in the Nuzi documents, and the classical Gr. form *Kossaios*. The other adverse factor is linked with specialized Heb. usage. In vs. 10 (see NOTES) the term "heads" can have nothing to do with streams into which the river breaks up after it leaves Eden, but designates instead four separate branches which have merged within Eden. There is thus no basis for detouring the Gihon to Ethiopia, not to mention the search for the Pishon in various remote regions of the world.

There is, finally, the motif of the tree of knowledge which likewise betrays certain Mesopotamian links. The discussion, however, may best be combined with the COMMENT on iii 5. For the present, it need only be remarked in passing that the Heb. for "the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and bad" is extremely awkward syntactically, especially in a writer who is otherwise a matchless stylist. Moreover, vs. 17 has nothing to say about the tree of life, and speaks only of the tree of knowledge. There is thus much in favor of the critical conjecture that the original text had only "and in the midst of the garden the tree of knowledge."

Would so much dependence on Mesopotamian concepts be strange in an author of *J*'s originality and caliber? Not at all. For it should be borne in mind that the Primeval History is but a general preface to a much larger work, a preface about a remote age which comes to life in Mesopotamia and for which that land alone furnishes the necessary historical and cultural records. In these early chapters, *J* reflects, in common with *P*, distant traditions that had gained currency through the ages.

3. THE FALL OF MAN

(ii 25-iii 24: *J*)

II 25 The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.

III 1 Now the serpent was the sliest of all the wild creatures that God Yahweh had made. Said he to the woman, "Even though God told you not to eat of any tree in the garden . . ."

2 The woman interrupted the serpent, "But we may eat of the trees in the garden! 3 It is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God did say, 'Do not eat of it or so much as touch it, lest you die!'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die. 5 No, God well knows that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be the same as God in telling good from bad."

6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eye, and that the tree was attractive as a means to wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave some to her husband and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened and they discovered that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

8 They heard the sound of God Yahweh as he was walking in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from God Yahweh among the trees of the garden.

9 God Yahweh called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard the sound of you in the garden; but I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." 11 He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you, then, taste of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" 12 The man replied, "The woman whom you put by my side—it was she who gave me of that tree, and I ate." 13 God Yahweh said to the

woman, "How could you do such a thing?" The woman replied, "The serpent tricked me, so I ate."

¹⁴ God Yahweh said to the serpent:

"Because you did this,
Banned shall you be from all cattle
And all wild creatures!
On your belly shall you crawl
And on dirt shall you feed
All the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will plant enmity between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and hers;
They shall strike at your head,
And you shall strike at their heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said:

"I will make intense
Your pangs in childbearing.
In pain shall you bear children;
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
And he shall be your master."

¹⁷ To the man^a he said: "Because you listened to your wife and ate of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat,

Condemned be the soil on your account!
In anguish shall you eat of it
All the days of your life.

¹⁸ Thorns and thistles
Shall it bring forth for you,
As you feed on the grasses of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
Shall you earn your bread,
Until you return to the ground,
For from it you were taken:
For dust you are
And to dust you shall return!"

^a MT, LXX "Adam."

²⁰ The man named his wife Eve,^b because she was the mother of all the living.^c ²¹ And God Yahweh made shirts of skins for the man and his wife, and clothed them.

²² God Yahweh said, "Now that the man has become like one of us in discerning good from bad, what if he should put out his hand and taste also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever!"

²³ So God Yahweh banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. ²⁴ Having expelled the man, he stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

^b Heb. *hawwā*.

^c Heb. *hay*.

NOTES

iii 1. *Even though*. The interrogative sense which is generally assumed for Heb. *'ap kī* in this single passage would be without parallel; some critics emend accordingly to *ha'ap kī*. But the corresponding *gam kī* is used for "although," cf. Ps xxiii 4, and the meaning suits the context admirably (Ehrl.). The serpent is not asking a question; he is deliberately distorting a fact.

not to eat. Heb. literally "you shall not eat," since the language has no simple way to express indirect discourse.

2. *interrupted*. Literally "said"; the Heb. stem *'mr* is capable of describing varying types of utterance.

3. *touch it*. In her eagerness to make her point, the woman enlarges on the actual injunction; cf. ii 17.

5. *No*. For this use of *kī* (as opposed to the normal conjunctive force), cf. xxxi 16; Deut xiii 10; Job xxii 2; Ruth i 10 etc.; see KB, p. 431, No. 7.

God. Since Heb. *'elōhīm* is grammatically a plural, and may be used not only for "God," but also for "gods, divine beings," the context is sometimes ambiguous; nor is a modifying plural form, such as the participle "who know" in the present instance, necessarily conclusive. In vs. 22 "one of us" would seem to imply a celestial retinue, but there the speaker is God himself. The serpent might aim at a different effect. In these circumstances no clear-cut decision is possible; "celestials, immortals," or the like would be just as appropriate.

6. *a means to wisdom*. Literally "(to be coveted) in order to become (not 'to make') wise." The so-called causative conjugation of

Heb. is often intransitive (see JCS 6 [1952], 81 ff.); cf. vi 19 f., xxxv 17, xlix 4.

8. *walking*. A good example of the special durative conjugation in Heb.; cf. vs. 24, v 22, 24, and see JAOS 75 (1955), 117 ff.

at the breezy time of day. The Heb. preposition *le-* may be used of time (cf. viii 11), but not temperature; hence the memorable "in the cool of the day" lacks linguistic support. The time involved is toward sundown, when fresh breezes bring welcome relief from the heat.

9. *Where are you?* The question is obviously rhetorical.

11. *then*. Suggested by the inversion in Heb. for added emphasis.

13. *How could you . . . ?* Cf. xii 18.

14. *Banned*. The Heb. stem *'rr* is regularly translated as "to curse," but this sense is seldom appropriate on closer examination. With the preposition *mi(n)*, here and in vs. 17, such a meaning is altogether out of place: "cursed from the ground" (*ibid.*) only serves to misdirect, and "cursed above all cattle and all the beasts of the field" (present instance) would imply that the animal world shared the serpent's guilt. The basic meaning of *'rr* is "to restrain (by magic), bind (by a spell)"; see JAOS 80 (1960), 198 ff. With *mi(n)* the sense is "to hold off, ban" (by similar means). In vs. 17 the required nuance is "condemned."

15. *offspring*. Heb. literally "seed," used normally in the collective sense of progeny. The passage does not justify eschatological connotations. As Dr. put it, "We must not read into the words more than they contain."

16. *pangs in childbearing*. A parade example of hendiadys in Heb. (cf. i 2 and see above, p. LXX). The literal rendering would read "your pangs and your childbearing," but the idiomatic significance is "your pangs that result from your pregnancy."

17. *man*. Cf. NOTE on ii 20.

Condemned. See above, vs. 14.

on your account. LXX translates "as you till it," reflecting *b'bdk*, whereas Heb. reads *R/D*; the two letters are easily confused.

19. *earn your bread*. Literally "eat your bread"; but the effort described is in the producing of grain to be eaten (Ehrl.), not in the eating of it.

22. *Now that*. Heb. *hēn . . . w'attā* introduce the protasis and the apodosis, so that the two clauses cannot be interpreted as independent.

one of us. A reference to the heavenly company which remains obscure.

24. *cherubim*. Cf. Akk. *kāribu* and *kuribu* which designate figures of minor interceding deities (cf. S. Langdon, *Epic of Creation*, 1923, p. 190, n. 3).

fiery revolving sword. Although the description pertains to an act of

Yahweh, the detail appears to be derived from Mesopotamian traditions. Most of the gods of that land had distinctive weapons of their own, such as the dagger of Ashur or the toothed sword of Shamash. Another illustration may be found in the concluding lines of *Enūma eliš* I (ANET, pp. 63, 160 f.); there the rebel gods are said "to make the fire subside" and "to humble the Power-Weapon." The fire would seem to characterize the weapon, a metaphorical description apparently of the bolt-like or glinting blade. The magic weapon was all that stood between the insurgent gods and their goal.—The Heb. for "revolving" (or "constantly turning") is another instance of the special durative conjugation; cf. NOTE on vs. 8.

COMMENT

Now that the stage has been set, the author can hit his full stride. There is action here and suspense, psychological insight and subtle irony, light and shadow—all achieved in two dozen verses. The characterization is swift and sure, and all the more effective for its indirectness.

Everything is transposed into human terms. The serpent is endowed with man's faculties, and even God is pictured in subjective and anthropomorphic fashion. When Adam has been caught in his transparent attempt at evasion, Yahweh speaks to him as a father would to his child: "Where are you?" In this context, it is the same thing as, "And what have you been up to just now?" This simple phrase—a single word in the original—does the work of volumes. For what *I* has thus evoked is the childhood of mankind itself.

Yet the purpose of the author is much more than just to tell a story. *I* built his work around a central theme, which is the record of a great spiritual experience of a whole nation. But a nation is made up of individuals, who in turn have their ancestors all the way back in time. When such a composite experience is superbly retraced and recorded, the result is also great literature.

Behind the present episode lay many traditions which provided the author with his raw material. In the end product, however, the component parts have been blended beyond much hope of successful recovery. Speculation on the subject has been going on for thousands of years and takes up many tomes. The following comment will confine itself to one or two of the more prominent details.

The focal point of the narrative is the tree of knowledge. It is the tree "in the middle of the garden" (vs. 3), and its fruit imparts to the eater the faculty of "knowing good and bad" (vs. 5; cf. vs. 22). In the last two passages, the objective phrase "knowing/to know good and bad" is faultless in terms of Heb. syntax. But the longer possessive construction "the tree of knowledge of good and bad" (ii 9, 17) is otherwise without analogy in biblical Hebrew and may well be secondary.

More important, however, than those stylistic niceties is the problem of connotation. The Heb. stem *yd'* signifies not only "to know," but more especially "to experience, to come to know" (cf. COMMENT on Sec. 4); in other words, the verb describes both the process and the result. In the present phrase the actual sense is "to distinguish between good and bad"; cf. II Sam xix 36, where "between" is spelled out; see also I Kings iii 9. The traditional "good and evil" would restrict the idiom to moral matters. But while such an emphasis is apparent in I Kings iii 9 and Isa vii 15, 16, and might suit Deut i 39, it would be out of place in II Sam xix 36. In that context, the subject (Barzilai) shows very plainly that he is a keen judge of right and wrong. At the age of eighty, however, his capacity for physical and aesthetic pleasures is no longer what it used to be: he has lost the ability to appreciate "good and bad." The same delicate reference to physical aspects of life is implied in our passage, which leads up to the mystery of sex (cf. Ehrl., and see McKenzie, *Theological Studies* 15 [1954], 562 f.). For so long as the man and his wife abstain from the forbidden fruit, they are not conscious of their nakedness (ii 25); later they cover themselves with leaves (iii 7). The broad sense, then, of the idiom under discussion is to be in full possession of mental and physical powers. And it is this extended range of meaning that the serpent shrewdly brings into play in iii 5.

Such motifs as sexual awareness, wisdom, and nature's paradise are of course familiar from various ancient sources. It is noteworthy, however, that all of them are found jointly in a single passage of the Gilgamesh Epic. There (Tablet I, column iv, lines 16 ff., ANET, p. 75), Enkidu was effectively tempted by the courtesan, only to be repudiated by the world of nature; "but he now had wisdom, broader understanding" (20). Indeed, the tempess goes on to tell him, "You are wise Enkidu, you are like a god" (34); and she marks his new status by improvising some clothing for him (column

ii, lines 27 f., ANET p. 77). It would be rash to dismiss so much detailed correspondence as mere coincidence.

This is not to imply that *J* had direct access to the Gilgamesh Epic, even though *J*'s account of the Flood reflects a still closer tie with the same Akkadian work (Tablet XI, see comment *ad loc.*). Such affinities, however, lend added support to the assumption that in his treatment of Primeval History *J* made use of traditions that had originated in Mesopotamia. Now derivative material of this kind is sometimes taken more literally than the original sources intended it to be; note, for example, the narrative about the Tower of Babel. It is thus conceivable that the poetic "You are wise Enkidu, you are like a god" (see above) might give rise to the belief that in analogous circumstances man could become a threat to the celestials. And if the concept reached ancient Hebrew tradition, in common with patriarchal material, *J* would in such an instance be no more than a dutiful reporter. He could only articulate the transmitted motifs.

The concluding verses of the present section appear to be a case in point. On the evidence of vs. 22, the serpent was right in saying that God meant to withhold from man the benefits of the tree of knowledge (vs. 5); the same purpose is now attributed to Yahweh. Yet all that this need mean is literal application of a motif that Hebrew tradition took over from Mesopotamia centuries earlier. In any event, the specific source and the precise channel of transmission would remain uncertain; nor have we any way of knowing how the author himself interpreted these notions.

We are on slightly firmer ground when it comes to the subject of God's resolve to keep the tree of life out of man's reach. In later narratives, starting with Abraham, the point is never brought up, since man knows by then his place in the scheme of things, and Yahweh's omnipotence precludes any fear of competition from whatever quarter. In other words, here is again a motif from the Primeval Age based on foreign beliefs. And once again, the center of dissemination is Mesopotamia, which provides us this time with at least two suggestive analogues: the tale of Adapa (ANET, pp. 101 ff.) and, once more, the Epic of Gilgamesh with its central emphasis on man's quest for immortality. Inevitably, both attempts end in failure. To be sure, an exception was made in the case of Utnapishtim, the local hero of the Flood, but that special dispensation was not to be repeated: "Now who will call the gods for you to Assembly, / That you may find the life you are seeking?" (Gilg.,

Tablet XI, lines 197 f.). In the end, Gilgamesh is favored with a concession: he is permitted to take back with him a magic plant which offers the sop of rejuvenation (Tablet XI, line 282), if not the boon of immortality. But he is soon to be robbed of it—by a serpent.

As a whole, then, our narrative is synthetic and stratified. Thanks, however, to the genius of the author, it was to become an unforgettable contribution to the literature of the world.

4. CAIN AND ABEL

(iv 1–16: J)

IV ¹The man had experience of his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, as she said, “I have added^a a life^b with the help of Yahweh.” ²Next she bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of flocks, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. ³In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to Yahweh of fruit of the soil. ⁴For his part, Abel brought the finest of the firstlings of his flock. Yahweh showed regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵but for Cain and his offering he showed no regard. Cain resented this greatly and his countenance fell. ⁶Yahweh said to Cain, “Why are you resentful, and why has your countenance fallen? ⁷Surely, if you act right, it should mean exaltation. But if you do not, sin is the demon at the door, whose urge is toward you; yet you can be his master.”

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, [“Let us go outside.”].^c And when they were outside, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹Then Yahweh asked Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He replied, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” ¹⁰And he said, “What have you done! Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil. ¹¹Hence you are banned from the soil which forced open its mouth to take your brother’s blood from your hand. ¹²When you till the soil, it shall not again give up its strength to you. A restless wanderer shall you be on earth!”

¹³Cain replied to Yahweh, “My punishment is too much to bear. ¹⁴Now that you have banished me this day from the soil,

^a Heb. *qānīnī*, literally “I acquired,” in assonance with “Cain.”

^b Literally “man, individual.”

^c So with Sam., LXX, and other ancient versions; MT omits.