

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

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

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



Buy me a coffee

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



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

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

perplexities, of irregularities and rebellions in doctrine and life, men are tempted to sigh for a spiritual despotism, and to lay at its feet the freedom which seems to them to be a perilous gift, in the vain hope that its sway will be perfectly wise, perfectly beneficent—it may be well in this matter, as in others, to turn from theory to history, and to read the story of the Papacy, not in its worst corruption, but in its palmy days of dignity and nobility of idea—as impersonated not in an Alexander VI., but in an Innocent III.

ALFRED BARRY.



ART. II.—THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH.

No. XVI.

IN chap. xxv., verses 7-11*a*, 12-17, 19, 20, and 26*b*, are assigned to P. It may assist the inquirer to have these verses before him in connection with the passage immediately preceding. In xxiii. 20 we find the words, "And the field and the cave that is therein were made sure unto Abraham as a possession of a burying-place by the children of Heth." The narrative of P, as separated by the critics, then immediately proceeds: "And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. (We may here interpolate a remark that the omission of any sentence by way of transition from xxiii. 20 is unusually 'juristic,' even for P.) And Abraham gave up the ghost and died in a good old age, an old man and full (of years), and was gathered unto his people. And Isaac and Ishmael his son buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; the field which Abraham purchased of the children of Heth; there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife. And it came to pass after the death of Abraham that God blessed Isaac his son. Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham; and these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations; the first born of Ishmael, Nebaioth and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam, and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names by their villages, and by their encampments; twelve princes according to their nations. And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years, and he gave up the ghost and died,

and was gathered unto his people. And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan-Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian, to be his wife. And Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them."¹

One rubs one's eyes a little at the last sentence, which appears a little unintelligible. But one has to rub one's eyes—at least, if they are ordinary eyes—a good deal when one has to deal with biblical criticism of the modern type. At least, it is perfectly clear here that some portion of P's narrative—if there be such a narrative—has been left out. And as I have observed before, if anything be left out here, how do we know how much has been left out here and elsewhere? But by the hypothesis nothing of importance is left out, but the "priestly" narrative is embodied *in extenso*, or almost so. P's account, then, of the birth of Jacob and Esau must be regarded as a matter of no importance. That being the case, why the detail of Isaac's age was carefully inserted from P seems not quite clear, nor can we altogether take it for granted that all details on such a point must necessarily have been inserted from P. However, let that pass. Another point which strikes one as singular is the insertion of details about Ishmael and his family between the references to Isaac in ver. 11 and ver. 19. With Ishmael the "priestly" writer has nothing to do. Then the narrative just here is singularly and unusually "juristic," and formal, in great contrast to the last supposed extract from P (chap. xxiii.). Nevertheless there is repetition in it (see ver. 8), a fact which, when it suits the critics, is a proof of different authorship, and when it does *not* suit them, is not a proof of different authorship. Moreover the poetic phrase, "give up the ghost," is used as in chap. vii. 21.² Other points also call for notice. First of all, verses 1-5, though genealogies, and "formal and juristic" enough in all conscience, one would think, are assigned to JE (in spite of that writer having been the reverse of formal and juristic), no doubt because יָלַד and not הוֹלִיד is used for "begat." The latter is used in ver. 19, and therefore ver. 19 is taken from P. If we ask why, we are told that הוֹלִיד is characteristic of P. This is a proof according to the critics. No other demonstration

¹ The translation here is Mr. Bissell's, in his "Genesis Printed in Colours."

² It may be observed that in ver. 8 the two expressions assigned to JE and P in chap. vii. 21, מוֹת and נָפַח, are *combined*—no slight indication that all three verses are due to the same hand.

is forthcoming. Again one is inclined to wonder why the redactor permitted himself to hand down the paragraph about the children of Keturah. We hear nothing of them in the later history, and the whole story seems harder to believe than anything else we learn of Abraham, nor does it fall in with the supposed object of the redactor. The allusion to Abraham's concubines seems stranger still, stranger than anything else in the history, and it appears doubly strange to find it inserted in a post-exilic redaction, drawn up for the purpose of glorifying the ancestor of all Israel. The word פְּלִיִּשׁ, as I have before stated, is never found save in connection with genealogies, which seems to suggest the idea that the genealogies existed in a separate form when the book was compiled, and were added at the time, or afterwards, from ancient records. However this may be, one may at least be permitted to wonder where the redactor, compiling the book at so late a date as he is supposed to have done, found his information about Abraham's concubines and their children. For ver. 6 is supposed to be the work of the redactor himself. And, as we have seen, the insertion of such a detail is the last thing we should have expected from him.

The next remark that would occur to the literary critic would probably be that the mention once more (chap. xxv. 9) of the "cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar, the Hittite, which is before Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased of the children of Heth," is a little unnecessarily formal and legal, even in a "priestly" writer, coming, as we are asked to believe, *immediately* after chap. xxiii.,¹ where the story of the purchase of the cave is recorded in minute detail; whereas if chap. xxiv. be interposed, the repetition of the phrase becomes at once natural. Another presumption this in favour of homogeneity. Then the interpolation from JE of the words, "and Isaac dwelt in Beer-'lahai-roi," is remarkable; but, as I have already referred to the point, I need say no more than that the assignment of this half-verse to J seems a little "willkürlich." Then the expression, שִׁיבָה טוֹבָה (a good grayness), is a very remarkable one, and occurs only here and in chap. xv. 15 in the Pentateuch. How does the reader think this little difficulty—this rather striking indication of unity of authorship—is got over? Chap. xv. 15 is assigned to the redactor! This is ingenious, no doubt, but not conclusive. As usual, no proof is given. Were the so-called "traditional" critic to resort to such violent expedients, what fierce reproaches, what scornful

¹ The reader is requested to read chap. xxiii. and then chap. xxv. 7-11, omitting chaps. xxiv. 1-xxv. 6, to see the force of this remark.

epithets, would be hurled at his devoted head! And yet, one might think, he has just as good a right to make assertions as other people. Then, again, we only have the poetic expression, "old and satiated" (with years) here, though it recurs in a slightly altered form, "satiated with days," in chap. xxxv. 29 (assigned to P) and at the end of the poetic book of Job. Thus, in this short passage we have two instances of the "juristic" writer deviating in the most surprising and inconsistent way into poetic forms of expression. There is evidently either a fund of poetry in the "juristic" writer, which he found it difficult to repress, or no "juristic" writer at all. The phrase, "was gathered unto his people" (vers. 8, 17), once more, is a little out of place in a "juristic" writer. The redactor, we are told, has introduced on his own account a sort of imitation of it in chap. xv. 15, and it occurs again in chap. xxxv. 29, and twice in the touching passage (about as little "juristic" as any passage can be) chap. xlix. 29-33, in which we are bidden again to see the hand of the priestly writer. We submit, of course, to the voice of authority, as in duty bound. But we feel a little puzzled at the beautiful touch of nature in the "juristic" writer publishing his narrative twelve hundred years after the event, and putting the words dramatically into the mouth of Jacob: "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah." We observe, too, that this post-exilic writer was well acquainted with the fact that Rachel was *not* buried there, so he must have had JE or some other narrative before him, which contained some similar mention of Rachel's place of sepulture. And why did he commit himself to the statement, which is not in any other of the presumed authorities which have come down to us, that Leah *was* buried there? and how did he so carefully avoid committing himself to the statement, which would have fallen in admirably with his presumed purpose, that Rachel *was not* buried there?

Other difficulties also crowd upon us as we reflect. Is the story of the purchase of the field of Machpelah history or tradition, for it meets us only in P? And why did Jacob not wish to be buried with Rachel, whom he loved, rather than with Leah, whom he despised? It looks very much as if the only explanation of the mystery is that the whole history is authentic, and that even Jacob's love for Rachel must needs give way, at that supreme moment, to the sacred thought of the covenant made by Jehovah unto Abraham, and confirmed unto Isaac, and after him to Jacob himself. To this solemn conviction of a Divine appointment even private and personal affection, however strong, must be postponed; and thus

these minute touches not only corroborate each other, but bring out the deep inner religious meaning of the whole story. At least, so pious Christian interpreters used to think, until the time came when they were ordered to surrender their private judgment to those who sit in the chair of authority, and tell them that it is all a mistake.

Even the list of the sons of Ishmael, while it is impossible that it can have been compiled from the incidental mention of some of them in Isaiah and elsewhere, is in remarkable keeping with these stray hints. Thus in Isa. lx. 7 we have Kedar and Nebaioth mentioned together, while in Ps. cxx. 5 the tents of Kedar are spoken of as alien to the habits and feelings of an Israelite. Dumah, again, is mentioned as in the direction of Edom in Josh. xv. 52, and in conjunction with Seir in Isa. xxi. 11, while immediately afterwards we have "the burden of Arabia." One would naturally look for the descendants of Ishmael in the neighbourhood of Edom. And so we are told to do in ver. 18, in which, however, we are asked to see the hand of JE. Here, therefore, we have a network of subtle coincidences between JE, P, and other books of Scripture which is far beyond the inventive powers of any individual whatsoever. P here therefore shows once more the extraordinary minuteness and accuracy of his information. Where did he get it after the return from the Captivity? Have we not here once more another of those subtle touches which point to the oneness of authorship of Genesis and to the extreme improbability of the compilation theory which now holds the field?¹

Then there is the reference to the sons of Ishmael as inhabiting "villages" (חצר), by which is meant enclosures round a courtyard, or encampments with an open space in the middle, such as the book of Joshua tells us surrounded the cities of Israel after the settlement in Canaan. All these passages, it is true, are assigned to P. But again we ask, and ask in vain, why these minute details concerning the early pastoral life of Israel and Ishmael in the post-exilic writer? The word is not found in this sense in the later history of Israel, except in Chronicles of early tribes and of the Levites, though in Deut. ii. 23 it is used of the encampments of the Avites, and in Isa. xlii. 11 of encampments in the wilderness, and therefore of nomadic tribes. The peculiar and rare word טירה, again, translated "castles" here, and in Chron. vi. 54 (E.V.), "goodly castles" (of the Midianites); Numb. xxxi. 10, "palaces," Cant. viii. 9, and Ezek. xxv. 4;

¹ We may observe, further, that Kedar is mentioned as heathen in Jer. ii. 10, and as Arabian in Ezek. xxvii. 21.

and "habitations," Ps. lxi. 25. The passage in Numbers is assigned to P. But it is a little surprising to find a close similarity suggested between the dwellings of the Ishmaelites and the Midianites, and a close alliance between these tribes also hinted at in J and E (Gen. xxxvii. 25-28).

Our next point is that the word שְׁפָחָה, according to Wellhausen, is characteristic of J and P, but *not* of E, where we find אִמָּה. This may serve as an instance of the charge I have brought against him and his school of drawing very important conclusions, when it suits them, from very slender premises. If the use of אִמָּה for שְׁפָחָה distinguishes J from E, why may not the use of שְׁפָחָה by J and P be a sign of common authorship? And we have this latter word in xvi. 1b (J), in xvi. 3 (P), xvi. 5 (J), xvi. 8 (redactor), and xxv. 12 (P). Moreover, we have the phrase "Hagar the Egyptian" in xvi. 3 (P) and in xxi. 9 (E), and she is also called an Egyptian (מִצְרִיָּה) in xvi. 1b (J). Here are sufficient coincidences in style to balance, if not to outweigh, Wellhausen's contention that the use of אִמָּה in chap. xxi. 8-32 is a sign of a second Elohist writer, distinct from P. Is it not as fair, if not fairer, to conclude that the introduction of אִמָּה does not indicate a change of author, but only a change of idea, and that it was intended, as I have argued on chap. xxi., to emphasize the position of slavery in which Hagar stood?¹

Another point not undeserving of mention is this: if the German methods be correct, at least they ought to be applied universally. We have seen in the last paragraph an instance of the onesidedness of their application. We now arrive at another. We are asked to see in the use of יָלֵד and הוֹלִיד respectively a sign of divergent authorship. Why should we not equally see in the use of three different forms of expression in the verses assigned to P in this chapter tokens of the presence of three different authors? Thus in ver. 12 we have "Abraham's son," whom his mother "bare to Abraham." In ver. 13, instead of הוֹלִיד, etc., we have "the sons of Ishmael." And in ver. 19 we have the phrase הוֹלִיד (begat), which alone is said to be characteristic of P.

Returning to ver. 9 another significant fact meets us. P, we are told, confines himself to noting the special point of the covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham according to promise. Why does he then record the fact—natural enough if this be an authentic history, but quite improbable if it be history manipulated for a purpose—of the interment of Abraham by Isaac *and Ishmael*?

¹ אִמָּה seems to refer to the *duties*, אִמָּה to the *position* of the servant.

Our next point will be to remark on the odd character of the extracts from J here. I will give the material part of them *in extenso*. Chap. xxv. 1-5 is, we are told, from J, then ver. 11*b*, then ver. 18, then ver. 21. Let us see how they read consecutively: "And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac, and Isaac dwelt by Beer-lahai-roi. And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: he abode¹ in the presence of all his brethren. And Isaac intreated Jehovah for his wife, for she was barren." This singular combination of extracts suggests a mine of research to criticism, which is certainly at present unexhausted; I mean the omissions of the redactor in his citations from J and E, and his reasons for them. JE, too, it may be observed, so far as it is known to us, "knows nothing" of the death and burial of Abraham. What, we may wonder, does he say about it, for he could hardly pass it by unnoticed in his history. And why does not the redactor give us what he says on the subject? Then ver. 18 makes it clear that he has made some mention of Ishmael, for he says "they," and his sentence refers evidently to the Ishmaelites. Can the critics, after the manner of Professor Owen, construct the whole passage for us, or even any part of it, from the specimen afforded us here? And can they explain to us why the redactor has selected this, and only this verse? Why the *critics* have selected it is plain enough. Havilah occurs in Gen. iii. 11 (where, however, it has been assigned to the redactor). It may have been a slip to assign the word here to J. Perhaps further consideration may "prove" that the mention of Havilah here belongs to the redactor also. But we have the words "he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren," in chap. xvi. 12. This passage is assigned to J, therefore (my readers will observe the mathematical exactness of the proof) here also it must be from the hand of J. It is true there is the remarkable word "fell," which according to all laws of the German criticism ought to suggest a new author altogether. It is a remarkable *ἄπαξ λεγόμενον*, for Judg. vii. 12 does not suggest quite the same idea. Perhaps the idea is of the fall of the lot, as though Jehovah had allotted his position to Ishmael, and designed that it should be contiguous to Israel and Edom. But what J has specially to do with this way of looking at the matter we are not told. "As thou goest," we are told, is a gloss here; but the same expression occurs twice in chap. x. 19, 30, xiii. 10 (J). Is it so certain that the German critics are right? Have we not here an expression peculiar to the author of Genesis? It is

¹ Heb., *fell*.

not found in any other book. Altogether the motives for the insertion of this passage from JE are somewhat difficult to divine. *Prima facie* "they" would seem to be "his people" just mentioned, while "he," later on in the verse, refers to Ishmael himself, also mentioned in ver. 17. The two verses are coherent and consecutive enough as they stand. It is only the necessities of Germanizing criticism which demand that they shall be assigned to two different authors.

The same may be said of vers. 20, 21. The narrative after the death and burial gives us an account (for the word תלדות seems to have a meaning something like our word *career*) of Isaac, the covenant representative of Israel, after the death of his predecessor. Ver. 21 tells us his age when he married Rebekah; ver. 22 tells us of Rebekah's barrenness, and of Isaac's prayer on her behalf. The following verses tell us of the answer to his prayer, and ver. 26b informs us that it was delayed for twenty years. It is only the pure assumption that all the drier details and the numbers are the work of a separate author, which compels the assignment of this portion of ver. 26 to P. There is nothing strained, artificial, unnatural, but quite the contrary, in supposing it all to be one man's work.

Since the above was written, I have observed a letter from Dr. Woods in the *Guardian*, in reference to Professor Driver's "Leviticus." I should like once more to explain that I have no complaint to make of a criticism which attempts to explain Leviticus by assigning different dates to different parts of the book. It is, of course, by no means impossible that later additions may have become embodied in the Law. Such questions may undoubtedly be left to experts. What I have combated in my papers, and what, I feel, must be left to the judgment of Christians at large, is (1) the assertion that it is possible to distribute with infallible accuracy the contents of the Pentateuch or "Hexateuch" between a Jehovist, an Elohist, a Deuteronomist, and a priestly writer; (2) the extremely late date assigned to these various writers; (3) the assertion that the history, as handed down by them, is seriously and fundamentally inaccurate; and (4) the assertion that the after history has been subjected to a careful revision, in order to give currency to their blunders or intentional misstatements.

J. J. LIAS.

