

# 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:

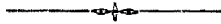
[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

have time afforded for further thought, to enlist the opinions of other minds, to listen to a Bishop's wisdom in counsel in the last resort.

What has been said about the ignoring of the layman's legitimate influence, of his responsible and honourable estate, of the valuable counsel of the humblest in the Church of England, is only too true. The best results may be anticipated from a due and balanced recognition of every true member in co-operation, counsel, and influence in the body of Christ. But in an ancient historical Church improvements must be slow and tentative to be improvements indeed. Long custom must be broken down by gradual education. If the Bishops would advise to all their presbyters the trial of voluntary Parish Councils with defined powers and constitutional checks, we should be nearer a just legislation.

It is no imagination but a grave certainty that there is a possibility of being hurried into the other extreme. It is absolute from Scripture and the primitive Church, the proper standpoint of a Catholic Churchman, that it is a commandment of Jesus Christ that the presbyter should lead and govern for the everlasting good of the Church, which He purchased with His own blood.

What we want is constitutional government.



#### ART. VII.—ASSYRIOLOGY AND THE EARLY RECORDS OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

THE discovery of ancient monuments in the Nearer East, and the decipherment of the cuneiform writing which most of them bear, proceed apace, and as nearly all these have some reference to Bible lands and illustrate Old Testament history, we cordially welcome the appearance of a volume by one of the most competent experts,<sup>1</sup> giving us a full outline of Assyriological research in its bearings on the narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures.

It would be impossible in a monthly magazine to review *in extenso* a book covering as much ground as this book covers, especially when written by a scholar as thorough and as painstaking as Dr. Pinches; we propose, therefore, in this article to confine ourselves almost exclusively to a discussion of so

<sup>1</sup> "The Old Testament in the Light of the Historical Records and Legends of Assyria and Babylonia," by Theophilus G. Pinches, LL.D., M.R.A.S. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge).

much of the earlier part of it as treats of the Babylonian accounts of the creation of mankind, and of what Assyriology has to tell us of his dispersion after the Flood.

## I. THE CREATION.

When the late Mr. George Smith came upon the Chaldean account of the Deluge in 1872, and that of the Creation and Fall in 1875, extraordinary interest was naturally excited in the information he was able to put at the disposal of Christendom. It was believed by some that we had been wondrously permitted in these latter days to meet with "the clear and legible story of the Beginning as Abraham heard it in Ur, and the Pentateuch repeated it." But the "high dry light" of scholarship soon threw grave doubts upon that interpretation of what were certainly very notable discoveries, and the newly-found ancient records (especially that of the Deluge) were said to be but Chaldean legends of the twelve signs of the zodiac. As Dr. Pinches shows, this is not a satisfactory theory of the cuneiform mythological epic. We may now add that a complete refutation of it has appeared in the fullest and latest edition of the tablets of the Creation series—that of Mr. L. W. King, which has been published since the book before us, but to the then early forthcoming issue of which Dr. Pinches refers in a page or two of "Additions and Corrections" which he appended while his volume was passing through the press. Mr. King makes it clear that there were never more than seven tablets or sections in the series; they cannot, therefore, have been an epic of the zodiac. The Deluge tablets, on the other hand, were in a series of twelve; but the title given to the complete work by the Babylonians themselves was "The Legend of Gilgames," and it correctly describes the series, which is not zodiacal. Gilgames was the king of the city of Erech, and the hero of the Flood; the name of the Babylonian Noah was Pir-Napistim or Uta-naistim.

With reference to the Creation epic, Dr. Pinches (following in the main the late Mr. George Smith) points out that the Syrian writer Damascius<sup>1</sup> gave a more correct explanation than the modern zodiacal theory gave of the introductory part of the Babylonian Creation legend, which legend might well be named the Story of Bel and the Dragon. The dragon Tiamtu (Tiamat), aided by Kingu her husband, and by other gods, sought to get the Creation into her own hands. The rebellion

<sup>1</sup> As Dr. Pinches and Mr. Smith, following Cory, omit to state the place which is quoted from Damascius, it is desirable here to state that it is from his "Doubts and Solutions of the First Principles," cap. 125.

struck consternation into the breasts of the heavenly powers; but Merodach, the son of the great god Aa or Ea, accepted the task of destroying the evil dragon, and recovering from her the tablets of fate. Gross mythological and gruesome details tell how Merodach advanced to the attack, caught her in his net, compassed her destruction, and made of her corpse a covering for the heavens—in other words, the firmament. Thus far the third tablet brings us. The fourth tells us of the building of the heavens by Merodach, and the fifth describes the making and ordering of the moon and stars and their courses, according to the views of the Babylonian astrologers. The tablet which described the creation of man is lost,<sup>1</sup> but what is supposed to be the final one of the series, and which Mr. George Smith thought to contain an address to primeval man, is found really to contain an address to the god Merodach, praising him for his great work in overcoming the dragon and in ordering and making a new Creation.

As Dr. Pinches remarks, the discrepancy between this account of Creation and that of the Book of Genesis is exceedingly great. "The whole Babylonian narrative," he says justly, "is not only based upon an entirely different theory of the beginning of things, but upon an entirely different conception of what took place ere man appeared upon the earth." The two accounts of the same thing have little in common. One is mythology, the other is a pure and reasonable revelation from God to man whom He made in His own image and likeness.<sup>2</sup> We must, however, remember that not only is the cuneiform legend as we have it a very late copy, but its very *raison d'être* is the glorification of Merodach, who was the later national deity of Babylon.

In this connection there has to be considered another and shorter version of the Creation story which Dr. Pinches himself discovered, and which is written in the older pre-Semitic language of Babylon, the Akkadian (accompanied by a Semitic translation). Being in that earlier language, we should have presupposed that it would have had a mythological tendency different from and earlier than the Semitic version. But, no; this glorifies Merodach even more than the other. According to the Semitic version, Merodach was the youngest born of the gods, who, however, elected him to be their chief because of his conquest of Tiamtu and his new creation of

<sup>1</sup> Mr. King, however, has now recovered part of it.

<sup>2</sup> Similar is the view of Professor Kittel, in his excellent booklet on the "Babylonian Excavations and Early Bible History," translated by Mr. McClure, and published, with an added preface by Dr. Wace, by the S.P.C.K.

the universe; but according to the Akkadian version (in the form it has come down to us), Merodach appears to be the creator of all the gods, and so, as Dr. Pinches says, it "must belong to a comparatively late date, when the god Merodach had become fully recognised as the chief divinity, and the fact that Aa was his father had been lost sight of and practically forgotten."

Although the two poetical legends have much resemblance, so far as their imperfect remains allow us to judge, in their leading features, as, *e.g.*, in their accounts of the preparation of the heavenly habitations for the different gods, the creation of mankind, and the founding of the famous cities and temples of ancient Babylonia, they have also important differences. We have already referred to two: the inferior supremacy assigned to Merodach, and the much greater length of the Semitic account. There is one other difference which is very notable indeed, and that is that the Akkadian legend only is merely an introduction to an incantation for the purifying of a temple!

Infinite, however, as is the intellectual, moral, and religious disparity between the Babylonian and the Hebrew accounts of the Creation, it may be that both of the Babylonian legends are extremely corrupt, mythological forms of a primitive revelation which Moses was inspired to give afresh to the world, or to transcribe from an ancient record.

Furthermore, it is remarkable that the last tablet of the longer or Semitic Babylonian epic gives us an epilogue in praise of Merodach, who is "endowed with all the names and all the attributes of the gods of the Babylonians—the fifty renowned names of the great gods." They are given to him not under the name of Merodach, but under that of Tutu, an Akkadian word signifying the Begetter. This, in the judgment of Dr. Pinches, is "symbolic of a great struggle, in early days, between polytheism and monotheism;" the popular belief being in many divinities, the more thoughtful summing up all the attributes in one Divine Being. Our author further thinks it possible, as Dr. Hommel suggests, that the name of Aa or Ea, the father of Merodach, is another form of the Hebrew Yau or Jah (the shortened form of "Jehovah"), but that it is more likely that the people of the East may have assimilated the two divinities and "identified them with each other in consequence of the likeness between the two names." Certainly it was faith in the one true God which brought Abraham forth from the seething and overwhelming tide of polytheism which surged around him and enabled him to preserve that seed of the true faith, as in an ark, for the untold blessing of the human race for ever.

## II. THE DISPERSION OF MANKIND.

We turn now to consider the light thrown by the most recent researches in Assyriology upon the dispersion of mankind and the confusion of tongues.

As Dr. Pinches would readily acknowledge, we have by no means untied all the knots, philological and historical, which the Scripture narrative of these two events presents to us. A vast deal has yet to be done by the excavator, the decipherer, and the student of languages, before the solution of many of the problems of Gen. x. and xi. can be arrived at.

With reference to the dispersion of mankind, the greatest difficulties are to be found in the section (Gen. x. 6-20) which tells us of the sons of Ham, because many of the nations therein enumerated are, according to profane history, Semites in speech. Recently discovered monuments, however, throw much light on this section.

The prevalent idea among scholars, that the division of mankind noted in Gen. x. is not a historical, but a "geographical" one, is a bold stroke with the knife at the knot, but one which does not satisfactorily solve the difficulty, and seems to ignore the clear, thrice repeated statement of Gen. x. 5, 20, 31 (and 32). The subject is too large and complicated to be discussed here in detail; we must content ourselves with gaining some light on the main story.

It should be known, then, as we are here reminded, that "large additions have of late years been made to the number of ancient remains from Babylon, and most of these are of a very early period." Very many of them belong to the first Babylonian Dynasty, one of whose most celebrated rulers was Hammurabi, who is now pretty generally identified, for reasons which Dr. Pinches sets forth, with the Amraphel of Gen. xiv., and who was, therefore, contemporary with the patriarch Abraham. Of the older monuments, the cylinder seals show us a comparatively slim race, long-bearded, erect, and dignified. In the yet earlier sculptures, "the representations of kings and deities are often heavily bearded, but, on the other hand, high officials and others are generally clean-shaven." The dress, as well as the physical characteristics, are shown as differing very much. Hence, besides the native race, we see considerable foreign admixture. "Perhaps, however, the true explanation is that the plain of Shinar represents the meeting-point of two different races, one Cushite and the other Semitic," or, as we might otherwise phrase it, one the family of Shem and the other the family of Ham. The Akkadian (or Sumerian) tongue stands for the speech of the Cushite race, the later Babylonian for the Semitic race. When we

further note that before the gap immediately preceding Hammurabi's dynasty the cuneiform records are in the Akkadian language and after it in the Semitic, we comfort ourselves with the thought that Abraham, who came from the Babylonian land and was contemporary with Hammurabi, must probably have known, better than modern scholarship has yet been able to determine, the true story of the origin and dispersion of the nations.

Perhaps the critics will appreciate the further consideration that the natural prejudices of a Jewish writer (of Gen. x.) would have led him to claim the great nations of Shinar and adjacent lands for his own Semitic stock. That he did not do so is because the facts of historical tradition as well as the leading of inspiration guided his pen to a faithful record.

There is more to be said on this matter. Seeing that the Akkadian monuments give no special ideograph for a river (as the Semitic Babylonian do), and represent both mountain and country by the same character, which same character stands for the country of the Akkadians, of the Amorites or people of Canaan, and of the land of Aarat, we have in these facts an indication that the three peoples mentioned gradually spread from the mountains of the east (beginning, must we not say, at Aarat after the Deluge?), and that, by-and-by, "as they journeyed east [or, as the margin of the Revised Version suggests, as they journeyed 'in the east'] they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there."

We see, then, that the local colouring of ancient Babylonia is very strongly marked in Gen. x. and xi., and so confirms the old view of the patriarchal tradition of the pre-Abrahamic history of the Bible.

With reference to the Tower of Babel, Dr. Pinches considers the language of the former part of Gen. xi. 4 as the language of Eastern hyperbole, and interprets the verse, "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, and its top (*lit.* head) shall be in the heavens, and we will make to us a name," etc., as meaning, "Let us build a very high tower for a name and rallying-point, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." This rendering of the former part of the verse he thinks is confirmed by some of the names given by the ancient Babylonians to the old temple towers of Babylon, such as E-temen-ana, "the temple of the foundation-stone of heaven"; E-igi-e-di, meaning, apparently, "the temple of the wonder (of mankind)"; E-sagila, "the house of the high head." These names might, on the other hand, be supposed to justify the literal and traditional interpretation of the verse, to which, however, Dr. Pinches' objection is that "the mountains of Elam were not so very far off, and travellers from that part

would have been able to assure them (the builders of the tower) that the heavens would not be appreciably nearer on account of their being a few hundred cubits above the surface of the earth, even if the traditions of their fathers' wanderings had not assured them of the same thing."

So far the monuments go to confirm the historical correctness of Gen. x. and xi., but their evidence is imperfect; and Dr. Pinches suggests that the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. xi. 1-9) is an interpolation of a contemporary Babylonian tradition into the sacred narrative.

What we take to be his chief reason for this opinion is that it is not until *after* the account of the dispersion of the nations in chap. x. that we are told that "the whole earth was of *one* language and of *one* speech."

This difficulty, however, completely vanishes when we remember the very common usage of Hebrew historical writers of introducing incidents into their story, and telling the result of them before resuming their main theme. It greatly helps both brevity and vividness in a history to introduce its important features as episodes. The portion of the Book of Genesis before us is full of these—*e.g.*, the mention of the three sons of Noah who came out of the Ark leads the sacred historian to add that of them the whole earth was overspread, and then to introduce that incident of their father's shame which had such great and lasting consequences in the over-spreading of the earth; next (in Gen. x.) he enumerates the nations of the world in his own time as they sprang from those sons; after that (in Gen. xi. 1-9) he again returns to the early postdiluvian days to tell us how the different families of speech originated from one common stock; and, finally, he reverts yet once more to the period of the Deluge in order to trace (Gen. xi. 10 *et seq.*) the line of them unto Abraham, whose family is the subject of the whole later history of the Old Testament. This consideration of the historical manner of the writers of the Old Testament not only relieves, but removes the objection that the narrative first gives a brief enumeration of the nations of the earth, and then turns back to that earlier time when the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. It is, however, by overlooking this point, and supposing that Gen. xi. 1-9, at least, is to be taken in strict historic sequence to the tenth chapter, that Dr. Pinches' greatest difficulties as to the authenticity of the account of the confusion of tongues arise.

Another suggestion that he makes at this point is deserving of special consideration. It is that, instead of translating Gen. xi. 1 as "And the whole earth," etc., we should read, "And the whole *land* was of one language and of one speech,"



"the whole land" being either, as our author thinks, "the whole tract of country from the mountains of Elam to the Mediterranean Sea," or, as we might prefer to take it, the whole land of Shinar and the inhabited parts around it, as well as that through which the tribes of Shinar had passed on their way thither from the region where the ark rested. As far as mere translation goes, certainly the phrase "the earth" (*ha arets*) not infrequently is and must be rendered with only a local meaning, as of "the land" or country of, *e.g.*, Israel or Egypt.

Even, however, if we thus restrict the word in this place and again in the former part of ver. 9, we should still be left with some expressions which seem to imply more than a merely *local* reference, as where we are told that "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the *children of men* builded. . . . Behold, they have all one language. . . . The Lord did then confound the language of all the land: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth." The tone of these words and the plan and purpose of the Book of Genesis seem, as we have said, to imply more than a merely local reference to the Plain of Shinar.

But here we are met by other considerations. Had it not been for the reasons just mentioned, we should have supposed that the families of Noah's sons as they multiplied would betake themselves to form new settlements north, south, east, and west of their first halting-places on the slopes of Aarat, establishing themselves sooner or later, as Gen. x. tells us they did establish themselves, "in the isles (or coastlands) of the nations"; in the cities and lands of the Euphrates, Tigris, and Mediterranean; of Syria, Elam, and Arabia. We might further have supposed that this division of the world began, effectively or in some very marked way, in the early years of Shem's grandson Peleg, as, indeed, Scripture tells us, "for in his days was the earth divided."

If this were the case, the miracle of Babel would have been more restricted in its operation than has hitherto been generally supposed, and would have been universal only with regard to the ancestral home and the kindred of the patriarch Abraham.

However this may have been, the perusal of Dr. Pinches' volume shows us afresh and impressively how wondrously truthful are the anticipations, or, rather, the records, of Holy Writ, and assures us that we may well be content to wait with patience and trust for the explanation and vindication of much that is still obscure.

A further illustration of their accuracy is supplied us in Dr. Pinches' appendix with reference to a long-standing critical objection to Gen. x. 22. In that verse we are plainly told

that Elam was a son of Shem; but the Elamitic language as hitherto known—that is, the old Persian—is an Aryan (or Japhetic) language. Obviously, therefore, says a rationalizing criticism, this proves that the “roll call of the nations” in Gen. x. is not true history, though it may be an approximately correct geographical survey of the nations of, say, Moses’ time, or, preferably, much later. The recent discovery of many inscriptions, however, shows us that “*Semitic* Babylonian was not only well known” in ancient Elam, but was “also used in that country”; and the indications are, as Scheil and Pinches suggest, that, in truth, Elam was the very first Semitic settlement, as might be inferred from Gen. x. 22.

Lastly, one of the latest discovered, as well as the largest and perhaps most important of the Semitic Babylonian inscriptions found in Elam, is that met with in the excavations of the French *délégation* at Susa, which has been published with a French translation, by Scheil, and was described by our author at the meeting of the Society of Biblical Archaeology in November last. The monument is a great stela  $7\frac{1}{2}$  feet high, inscribed with over 3,600 short lines of Babylonian cuneiform, besides space from which five columns more have been erased. Apart from about 700 lines in glorification of its author, the inscription contains a *legal code*. It is of great antiquity, as it dates from Hammurabi, Abraham’s contemporary; but its importance was long recognised, and the ancient Assyrians made copies of it; part, at least, of one of them is now in the British Museum. The whole of Hammurabi’s legal code has been already carefully rendered into English by the Rev. C. H. W. Johns, and published as a little volume under the title of “The Oldest Code of Laws in the World.”

It is instructive to recall that the higher critics of but a short time ago derided the notion that in the much later age of Moses could anyone have composed a Levitical or legal code. Civilization and literature, it was urged, were not then nearly advanced enough to have permitted the production of an elaborate work of that sort. Alas! for critics’ hypotheses; we may now behold with our bodily eyes a long legal code as old, at least, as the times of the patriarch Abraham.

W. T. PILTER.

