

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 Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Archaeological Commentary on Genesis.

BY THE REV. A. H. SAYCE, LL.D., PROFESSOR OF ASSYRIOLOGY, OXFORD.

II. i. THE Hebrew, 'host of them,' corresponds with the Sumerian *sar* or *sarra*, which was borrowed by Semitic Babylonian in the sense of the 'host of heaven,' as in *Ki-sar*, 'the place of the hosts,' *i.e.* the lower firmament, which is also explained as meaning 'the hosts of the earth,' in opposition to *An-sar*, 'the hosts of heaven.' *An-sar* and *Ki-sar* would thus be equivalent to the biblical 'host' of 'the heavens and the earth.' The 'hosts' of the Babylonian texts are the gods and demi-gods.

2, 3. In the account of the appointment of the moon to measure time, the Babylonian Epic calls the seventh day 'the Sabbath,' as was first perceived by Dr. Zimmern. In a lexical tablet the *Sabattu*, or Sabbath, is described as 'a day of rest for the heart,' which some Assyriologists think means the heart of the gods rather than the heart of men. If so, we shall have in the expression an exact parallel to the biblical statement that God rested on the seventh day. In a lexical tablet, however (83, 1-18, 1330 *Obv.* i, 21-24), it is stated that the Sumerian *zur* was equivalent not only to *suppu* and *sullu*, 'prayer,' but also to *nukkkhu*, 'rest,' and (*nukh*) *Sabathin*, '(rest) of the Sabbath.' An old list of Babylonian festivals tells us that on the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st, and 28th days of each month this Sabbath-rest had to be observed. The king, it is laid down, 'must not eat flesh that has been cooked upon the coals or in the smoke, must not change the garments of his body, must not wear white robes, must not offer sacrifices, must not ride in a chariot; the prophet may not mutter in a secret place, medicine may not be applied to the body.' The king, of course, is here the representative, or 'shepherd' as he is termed, of his people. As the months were lunar, the 19th day was the 49th from the first of the preceding month when a Sabbatical week (of seven times seven weeks) was completed. Seven was from the earliest period a sacred number among the Babylonians, and they counted seven planets, to each of which one of the days of the week was consecrated. The origin of the seven-day week was thus astronomical, dependent

on the lunar character of the Babylonian calendar. In the Old Testament this astronomical reason is entirely put aside, and the sacredness of the day ascribed either to the fact that God rested on it from the work of creation, or to its being a memorial of the cessation of the Israelitish bondage in Egypt (Deut. v. 15). The day ceased, therefore, to be dependent on the changes of the moon, and was observed every seven days irrespective of the beginning and end of the month.

With the conclusion of the biblical account of the Creation in days, we can inquire if we have any means of determining the date to which its composition may be assigned. Unfortunately, we do not know when the Babylonian Epic of the Creation was written. Most of the famous poems of Chaldea, including the great Epic of Gilgames, were productions of the age of Khammurabi, the contemporary of Chedor-laomer and Abraham, and the Epic of the Creation may, therefore, belong to the same date. The fragments of Phœnician cosmology preserved by Philo Byblius show that it had been borrowed in large measure from the cosmology of Babylonia, but Philo flourished in the Roman period, so that no light is thrown on the age to which the fragments themselves may have reached back. Dr. Gunkel, however, has recently pointed out (*Schöpfung und Chaos*) that references to the story of Tiamat occur in pre-Exilic as well as in post-Exilic passages of the Old Testament (*e.g.* Isa. xvii. 12-14; Jer. iv. 23-26, xxvii. 5), and the 'sea' made by Solomon for the temple indicates an acquaintance with it. In the earliest days of Babylonia, similar 'seas' were made for its temples as symbols of the primæval 'deep,' out of which the world arose. They were called 'seas,' as in Hebrew, and were supported on oxen like the 'sea' in the Jewish temple.

There were three periods when a Hebrew writer could have become acquainted with the literature and traditions of Babylonia. One of these periods was that of the Exile. A second was the period which followed the conquest of the northern tribes by Tiglath-pileser III. and the submission

of Ahaz to the Assyrian king. Under Hezekiah we hear of a library at Jerusalem where scribes were employed in re-editing the older literature of the country, just as they were in Assyria and Babylonia (Prov. xxv. 1). The third period was that of the age of the Exodus. The Tel el-Amarna tablets, as well as the inscriptions of the Babylonian kings, have taught us that Canaan had been overrun by Babylonian arms and influence long before the days of Abraham, and that down to the Mosaic age the whole of Western Asia was permeated by Babylonian civilisation and literature. Schools and libraries existed throughout it where the Babylonian language and writing were studied, as well as the Babylonian literature. Even on the banks of the Nile old Babylonian poems, like that which described the introduction of death into the world, were read and copied. The educated Egyptian and Canaanite of the Mosaic age were alike acquainted with the literary traditions and works of Babylonia.

To which of these periods can we assign with the greatest amount of probability the first chapter of Genesis? We have seen that the existence of a 'sea' in the temple of Solomon indicates that the Babylonian cosmology was already known in Israel. Jer. iv. 23 makes it clear that the technical language of Gen. i. 2 was familiar to the readers of the prophecy. But this does not prove that Gen. i. 1-ii. 3, as we now have it, was already in existence.

The narrative, however, forms an integral part of the plan of the Book of Genesis. It is the necessary introduction to it in its present shape, and cannot be removed without destroying the thread of connexion which runs through the history as well as the fundamental idea upon which it is based. The writer deduces all things from the one God, the God of Israel, gradually narrowing his geography and ethnology until his history is concentrated in the land of Canaan and the people of Israel. An equally integral part of the design of the book is the account of the Flood. When we come to consider it, we shall see that it is difficult to assign it to either the second or the third period of Babylonian literary influence upon Israel, and that the phenomena presented by the resemblances between it and the Chaldean account of the Deluge are scarcely explicable, except upon the theory that the Hebrew narrative goes back to the Mosaic age. If so, the

account of the Creation will go back to the same date.

4, 5. The expression 'these are the generations of the heavens and the earth' implies no evolutionary doctrine, since it is not followed by any account of the growth of the plants and animals out of them. On the contrary, the statement that everything was created by God is reiterated, and we are referred back to Gen. i. 1 in the words: 'God made the earth and the heavens.' But the opening sentence of ver. 5 ('No plant of the field was yet in the earth,' etc.) is a repetition of the line in the Babylonian Epic: 'The field was uncultivated, the marsh-plant ungrown,' which, it must be noted, is not represented in the biblical account of the Creation in days. The relation between the two passages is rendered the more striking by the fact that the Heb. *siakh*, 'plant,' is the Babylonian *sêh*, 'grown.' The same idea is expressed in another Babylonian poem on the Creation, which was discovered by Mr. Pinches. The poem originated in the sacred city of Eridu, near the Persian Gulf, and as it is in Sumerian, it must have been written at a very remote epoch in Chaldean history. The period of chaos is described in it as a time when 'as yet no reed had grown, no tree had been created.' Perhaps this line was in the mind of the poet of the epic when he composed his description of chaos.

According to the Babylonian poet, 'the field was uncultivated, the marsh-plant ungrown,' because all was still chaos under the dominion of Tiamat. This is formally contradicted by the biblical writer, who declares that the world had been created by God, and was consequently under His rule, and gives as the reason why the plants had not as yet grown the fact that there was no rain and no men to till the ground. He seems to have had the Babylonian statement before him, and while accepting the fact that the vegetable world did not exist, to have given a reason for it which was compatible with the belief that 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' At the same time the fact did not harmonise very easily with the account in the first chapter of the creation of plants and trees on the third day. But, as has already been observed, no reference to this creation is to be found in the Babylonian Epic, which passes at once from the formation of the earth and sea to the appointment of the heavenly

bodies to measure time. Do we not, then, seem bound to conclude that the statement in Gen. ii. 5, in spite of its inconsistency with what had gone before, was inserted on account of the place occupied by a similar statement in the Babylonian Epic? If so, the account of the Creation in Gen. ii. presupposes the epic quite as much as the account in Gen. i.

The expression 'Yahveh Elohim' is curious, and can only mean 'Yahveh, that is Elohim,' who appears throughout the first chapter. No light has been thrown by archæology on the origin and etymology of the name Yahveh. In Assyrian and Babylonian transcriptions of Hebrew names, it appears both as Yahu and as Ya'ava or Yava. Thus the name of Hezekiah is written Khazaqi-Yahu, and Mr. Pinches has found in contract-tablets the names Azzi-Ya'ava, Khul-Ya'ava, Abih-Ya'ava the daughter of Irih, Sapunu-Ya'ava, Gamar-Ya'ava, Natanu-Ya'ava, Aqabi-Yava. Besides these, there are names compounded with Yahveh, which show that the possessors of them had lapsed into paganism: Bel-Yahu ('Bel is Yahveh'), Nebo-Yah ('Nebo is Yah'), Ya'a-Dagon ('Yahveh is Dagon'), Nergal-edhir the son of Malaki-Ya'ava, and Dhabat-Issar ('Good is Istar') the daughter of Yaseh-Ya'ava. These names prove that besides Yahu and the contracted Yah, and Ya'a, the full form Ya'ava was also pronounced in compound names, though no traces of it now remain in our present Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

The form Yahu was explained by the Assyrians as if it was their own word *yahu*, *yâti*, 'myself' (B.M. 83, 1-18, 1332 *Obv.* ii. 1). It was a foreign word which had come to them from the Israelites. Outside Israel (and probably Edom) the name has not been met with. It is true that in the time of Sargon a king of Hamath was called Yahu-bihdi, and as the Assyrian monarch writes the name Ilu-bihdi in one of his inscriptions it is clear that Yahu was considered the equivalent of *ilu* or *el*, 'god.' But Yahu-bihdi was an ally of the Jewish king, and may therefore have himself been a Jew, or have had his name changed from Ilu-bihdi, just as the name of Eliakim was changed to Jehoiakim. Such a change of name actually took place in the case of an earlier Hamathite prince, the son of Toi being called Hado-ram, 'Hadad is exalted,' in 1 Chron. xviii. 10, and Jo-ram in 2 Sam. viii. 10. It has been supposed

that \hat{A} , a Babylonian sun-god, is Yahveh in a shortened form, like Ya, which is also found in Babylonian names preceded by the determinative of divinity. But \hat{A} is of Sumerian origin, and *ya* is sometimes the pronoun 'my' attached to the noun 'god,' sometimes an abbreviation of a word, as in Samsi-ya for Samsi-masizib.

6. *Êd*, 'a mist,' is borrowed from the Babylonian *edu*, which itself was borrowed from the Sumerian *adea*. *Edu* (and *iditu*) signified 'a flood,' and was used both of the 'flood' of the sea and of the 'overflow' of irrigation. It was a word which belonged rather to countries with great rivers and little rain, like Babylonia and Egypt, than to Canaan, and in migrating to Canaan accordingly it underwent a change of signification. But the whole conception of land watered by mist and not rain is Babylonian and Egyptian, not Canaanitic. In Canaan the fertility of the soil was dependent upon rain. It was only in Babylonia and Egypt that the mist took the place of rain. The whole account of Paradise, therefore, must go back either to Babylonia or to Egypt, and, as we shall soon see, the geography is that of Babylonia.

7. In the Sumerian story of the Creation discovered by Mr. Pinches, we read: 'Merodach bound together a reed-bed on the water: dust he made, and poured it out beside the reeds: in order that the gods might dwell in a seat of joy of heart, he formed man; along with him the goddess Aruru formed the seed of mankind.' The Babylonian word for 'dust' (*epiru*) is the same as the Hebrew. So, too, the Hebrew *nephesh*, 'soul,' is the Babylonian *napsat*.

8. Eden is the Sumerian Edin, 'the plain' of Babylon, which was borrowed by Semitic Babylonian under the form of Edinu. The word properly signified a 'plain,' but was more especially used of the great alluvial 'plain' or 'field' of Chaldea. We hear of the 'garden' that was planted in it in an old Sumerian hymn, originally composed in the city of Eridu. Eridu, 'the good city,' as its name denoted in Sumerian, now represented by Abu-Shahreïn, was built on the shores of the Persian Gulf, when the Euphrates and Tigris still flowed into the gulf through separate mouths, and before nearly a hundred miles of silt had been deposited between its site and the sea. At this period, about six thousand years ago, Eridu was the seaport of Babylonia, and, in con-

sequence of its foreign intercourse, became the disseminator of culture and religious ideas throughout Chaldea. The hymn begins as follows—

At Eridu a palm-stalk grew overshadowing ; in a holy place did it become green ;
its root was of bright lapis which stretched towards the deep ;
[before] the god Ea was its growth at Eridu, teeming with fertility ;
its seat was the (central) place of the earth ;

its foliage (?) was the couch of Bau the (primæval) mother.

Into the heart of its holy house which spread its shade like a forest hath no man entered.

The 'holy place' is the 'garden' of Genesis, though it is not clear whether the word 'eastward' used by the biblical writer means eastward of Eridu, or in the eastern part of the Babylonian 'plain.' It will be noticed that 'the man' was not created in the garden, and had to be transported to it from the spot where he had been formed.

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

II.

LETTERS OF MATTHEW ARNOLD. By G. W. E. RUSSELL. (*Macmillan*. 2 vols. crown 8vo, pp. xii + 402, 379. 15s. net.) A great man's letters may be published in order to make his reputation greater ; or in order to make it broader, showing that he was great in other ways than people knew ; or simply because they are a great man's letters. The third reason must have decided the issue of Matthew Arnold's letters. They add nothing to what we knew of his greatness, for surely we all knew already that he was a lover of home and friends, though they certainly take nothing away from it. They are simply good letters to read, being written by a man we know.

It may seem strange to say so of Matthew Arnold, but the impression his letters give us is, that he was in the world but not of it. Of course it is the political and social world of his own day—we use the word thus narrowly. He comes constantly into contact with women and men and things, but he tells us nothing about them we do not seem to know already. He did not care, we feel, to know them nearer, so that he might have something to say about them. They are all here, the great men of Matthew Arnold's day ; but they are here as we should find them in the newspapers.

No, that is too hard. There are things here the newspapers never see, and could not write. That description of Bishop Wilkinson's mission sermon, for example ; if only there had been more. What hindered him that he would not let himself go, or let others let themselves go with him ?

Tennyson says, 'We have but faith, we cannot know' ; surely with Matthew Arnold it was that he knew enough, but had not faith. To Matthew Arnold it seemed to be literally true that 'all our yesterdays but lighted fools the road to dusky death.'

THE EMPIRE OF THE PTOLEMIES. By J. P. MAHAFFY. (*Macmillan*. Crown 8vo, pp. xxv, 533. 10s. 6d.) Professor Mahaffy has given himself to this special historical field so long and so ably that he has well nigh made it his own. So he writes from his own knowledge, he does not depend on other men's. No doubt there is pioneer work that is more attractive than authoritative, yet we like the work that a man of parts does himself, going in front of others to do it, and we are always ready to give such work the widest welcome.

Moreover, Professor Mahaffy can write. He offers us living men with their human appeal to us. The times and the circumstances are widely apart (we thank the Lord Jesus Christ for that), nevertheless they touch us, these men and women, they are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

Lastly, this is the period of the history of Egypt we know least. Gathering this in some fulness and reality of knowledge, we shall know this country throughout its long marvellous fortunes. Professor Mahaffy has filled the blank for us in the most delightful way, and we thank him heartily.