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 configurate 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 Elohim (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 *tōlᵉdōt,* 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 partriarchs, *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 *tōlᵉdōt* (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

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[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 *'amtaḥat* "bag" for the otherwise familiar *śaq* "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 (xliv) 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 Penuel (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

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[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 61) 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 9 f., xlix 29 f., 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 redactorial 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 R_{JE} was distinct from R_P, 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 proto-
type. This point has already been made for *J* and *E* by several
scholars, notably Martin Noth, who designates the assumed prede-
cessor 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 *Grund-
lage* 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 circum-
stance, however, that our sources exhibit so many mutual disa-
greements 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 Tetrateuch—improvised its sub-
ject matter as it went along. In these circumstances, the logical sym-
bol for our hypothetical antecedent would seem to be "T,"[8] for Tra-
dition, 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 under-
stand, 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 secu-
lar 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 selec-
tive medium like "T" presupposes the existence of some screening
canon. This is not to be confused, of course, with the final Old Tes-
tament 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 haz-
ardous, 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. Egypt[10] 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 firstborn, 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 prac-
tice 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 sur-
reptitious 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 behav-
ior, 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 so-
cial 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 right-
ful 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 di-
rect 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 men-
tion 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 tradi-
tion originated in Central Mesopotamia, some time before the middle
of the second millennium B.C.—what was it that gave that tradi-
tion 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 re-
versed, since the focal event, the migration that set the whole proc-
ess in motion, originated in Mesopotamia—precisely where both
biblical and outside testimony have led us. Accordingly, the patri-
archs will now be viewed against the pertinent Mesopotamian set-
ting; 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 Hammurabi[11] 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

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[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 abso-
lute 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 es-
tablished 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 re-
sponsible for the country's balanced progress in governmental, intel-
lectual, and scientific matters.[12] And it sustained the historic civili-
zation 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 cen-
turies 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 him-
self 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 accept-
ance 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 Meso-
potamia to presuppose not only generic affiliation but also basic
accord. In both instances we find the same reverence for law imper-
sonally conceived, and the identical concept of non-autocratic gov-
ernment on earth. Such fundamental agreements would scarcely ar-
gue 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-quickening 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 extrabiblical 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.

1. OPENING ACCOUNT OF CREATION
(i 1–ii 4a: *P*)

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

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

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

14 God 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).
º 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." ^dAnd it was so.^d 21 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. 22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase; fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on earth." 23 Thus evening came, and morning—fifth day.

24 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. 25 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.

26 Then God said, "I^e 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],^f and all the creatures that creep on earth."

> 27 And God Created man in his image;
> In the divine image created he him,
> Male and female created he them.

28 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." 29 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;

^{d–d} Restored from LXX.
^e See NOTE.
^f See NOTE.

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30 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. 31 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^g 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 *watt^ehī hā'āreṣ*, not *w^ehā'āreṣ hāy^etā*.

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. *ru^aḥ* 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.

^g 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. *rāqīaʿ* "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. *mqwm,* 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. *wᵉ/ū*) in each of these functions (hendiadys, explicative, connective) is amply attested elsewhere.

15. *lights.* Heb. *mᵉʾōrōt,* differentiated from *mᵉʾōrōt* 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 (*šereṣ*) 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 (*rmś*) 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. *remeś* 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. *namaššū*) are juxtaposed to the larger beasts.

24. Heb. *bᵉhēmā* "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, Elohim (*ʾelōhīm*) 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 [*ḥyt*] *hʾrṣ* 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. *ṣābāʾ* 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 *ṣābu* 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 *šuteṣbû* 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, pro-
poses "declared finished," which appears to point in the same direction.

4. *story*. Heb. *tōlᵉdōt*, 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 as-
signed 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 in-
stances, there is scarcely any similarity in general treatment or spe-
cific emphasis. No less noteworthy is the stylistic contrast between
the respective sections, which cannot be ignored even in transla-
tion, 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 end-
less probing and each word subjected to minutest scrutiny. By the
same token, the end product cannot have been the work of an in-
dividual, but must be attributed to a school with a continuous tradi-
tion 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 specula-
tion.

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 state-
ment 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 His-
tory*, 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 con-
cerned. 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 cul-
tural 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 bib-
lical 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 indebted-
ness? 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 bor-
rowed 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 (*tĕhōm*)
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 eliš* 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 *bᵉrē'šīt*. 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'šīt*. 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 *bᵉrēšīt bᵉrō'* (*'ᵉlōhīm*), 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. '*ᵃdāmā*, in assonance with '*ādām*.

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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; what-
ever 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. *īš*, in assonance with '*iššā*.

NOTES

ii 4b. *At the time when.* Literally "on the day when"; Heb. *bᵉyōm*, cog-
nate 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 (Kᵉthib) as YHWH. The vocalized text (Qᵉre) has equipped this form with the vowels ᵉ-ō-ā, thus calling for the reading 'ᵃdōnāy "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 'ᵃdāmā "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 partitive 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, Ḥiddeqel 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 *mṣ'* 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 (*l'dm* 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. *'îš* 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 parenthetic 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. *edû*, 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 *Kuššú-* 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."

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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. ḥawwā.
[c] Heb. ḥay.

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 (ee 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 . . . wᵉ'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 J has thus evoked is the childhood of mankind itself.

Yet the purpose of the author is much more than just to tell a story. J 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 expecially "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 temptress 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 1 The 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." 2 Next she bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of flocks, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. 3 In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to Yahweh of fruit of the soil. 4 For his part, Abel brought the finest of the firstlings of his flock. Yahweh showed regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he showed no regard. Cain resented this greatly and his countenance fell. 6 Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you resentful, and why has your countenance fallen? 7 Surely, 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."

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

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

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a Heb. *qānîtî*, literally "I acquired," in assonance with "Cain."
b Literally "man, individual."
c So with Sam., LXX, and other ancient versions; MT omits.

and I must hide from your presence and become a restless wan-
derer on earth, anyone might kill me on sight!" 15 "If so[d]," Yah-
weh said to him, "whoever kills Cain shall suffer vengeance
sevenfold." And Yahweh put a mark on Cain, lest anyone
should kill him on sight.

16 Thereupon Cain left Yahweh's presence and settled in the
land of Nod, east of Eden.

[d] See COMMENT.

NOTES

iv 1. *had experience of.* See COMMENT.

Cain. If the name is cognate with Ar. *qayin* "metalworker," the
indicated derivation would be more in order in vs. 22. But this is
plainly yet another case of sound symbolism (cf. ii 5). The assonance
in Heb. *qayin* : *qny(ty)* may be reflected in English by "Cain :
gain(ed)."

a life. Heb. *'īš* stands for "man" in the sense of an individual being,
whereas *'ādām* (see ii 5) is undifferentiated and generic. Ordinarily the
term is applied to adults. Yet there is no warrant for suspecting the text,
as is sometimes done. In the circumstances, Eve is fully justified in
hailing the arrival of another human being.

with the help of. Heb. *'et* "with," which has drawn considerable
suspicion and speculation. It is worth mentioning, therefore, that Akk.
personal names often employ the corresponding element *itti,* e.g.,
Itti-Bēl-balāṭu "With Bel there is life."

2. *Abel.* The Heb. common noun *hebel* means "puff, vanity." If the
combination is pertinent, the name may be suggestive of the shepherd's
losing struggle against the farmer. But speculations of this sort are
often more intriguing than convincing.

4. *the finest.* Heb. has literally "namely ('and'), of their fattest parts,"
not "and their curds," which the text iself does not preclude. The
manifest contrast, however, is between the unstinted offering on the
part of Abel and the minimal contribution of Cain.

showed regard for. The Akk. cognate *šeû* signifies "to look closely
into."

5. *resented.* Literally "his anger was kindled."

7. See COMMENT.

8. *said.* The original must have contained Cain's statement, but the
text was accidentally omitted in MT, owing, no doubt, to the repeated

"outside" (literally "the field"); the ancient versions supply the missing
clause.

11. *banned.* See NOTE on iii 14.

12. *strength.* Used poetically for "produce," cf. Job xxxi 39.

restless wanderer. Literally "totterer and wanderer." Another instance
of hendiadys (cf. i 2).

13. *punishment.* Literally "iniquity," and its consequences.

14. *Now that.* See iii 22.

on sight. Literally "who reaches, finds me."

15. *If so.* MT *lkn* "therefore," which LXX and most of the other ver-
sions understood as *l' kn* "not so," the basis of the above translation.

mark. For various types of protective signs, usually placed on the fore-
head, cf. Exod xiii 16; Deut vi 8, xi 18; Ezek ix 4, 6 (*taw*); also Exod
xxviii 38; cf. JQR 48 (1957), 208 ff.

16. *Nod.* Literally "wandering," a symbolic place name for Cain's re-
treat, beyond Eden. The retreat of the Mesopotamian Flood hero Ut-
napishtim is similarly located "faraway, at the mouth of the rivers"
(Gilg., Tablet XI, line 196), east of the head of the Persian Gulf.

COMMENT

The story of early man is now carried a step further, embracing
the conflict between the pastoral and the agricultural ways of life.
The conflict is depicted in terms of the impact on the given individ-
uals. The author's ability to animate a large canvas with a few bold
strokes, and his ear for natural dialogue, are again put to highly
effective use.

Two problems of a linguistic nature require special discussion.
One concerns the translation of a single word, and the other affects
the understanding of an entire verse. In both instances the issues ex-
ceed the scope of the NOTES.

The reference to connubial relations in vs. 1 is customarily echoed
in English by the translation "knew." The rendering is unsatisfactory
on several counts. The underlying Heb. stem *yd'* is applied not only
to normal marital situations (cf. vss. 17, 25), but also to clandestine
conduct (e.g., xxxviii 26, where the traditional "and he knew her
again no more" is inept), and even homosexuality (xix 5). It is thus
not a matter of delicate usage, as is sometimes alleged. Nor is the
usage confined to Hebrew. Akkadian, for example, extends it to
dogs.

There has never been any doubt as to the exact meaning of the idiom. Its semantic basis, moreover, is independently attested by the analogous use of the Akk. verb *lamādum* "to learn, experience" (e.g., Code of Hammurabi rev., column ix, lines 69, 75; column x, line 6), which is identical with Heb. *lmd*. It was indicated earlier that Heb. *yd'* itself has a broader range than our verb "to know" and shares with *lmd* the connotation "to experience" (see COMMENT on iii 5). The slavish English reproduction falls thus short of the Hebrew as well. And unlike so many other English terms that are rooted in biblical usage, this one has never become self-sufficient; for when used in the sense here required, "to know" is still felt to be in need of such props as "carnally, in the biblical sense," or the like.

The problem, then, is strictly translational and peculiar by and large to English. German can get by with its *erkannte,* and French with *connut;* but our "knew" corresponds to *wusste* or *savait,* which would be unthinkable in the present instance. The difficulty is aggravated by the need for suitable equivalents for other related Heb. expressions (see vi 4, xix 31, 32). Accordingly, we are restricted to the concepts of experience and intimacy, depending on the particular context; "had experience of" is right semantically, if not stylistically.

A problem of much greater complexity is posed by vs. 7, where the reading and meaning of the original remain very much in doubt. The oldest versions are no less perplexed than the most recent interpreters. The consonantal text had come down apparently in reasonably good shape, since LXX, for one, differs from MT only in regard to a single letter: *lNth* instead of *lPth;* but the Greek reflects wide differences in word division and vocalization. There, the troubling clauses read, "Is it not true that, when you sacrifice correctly but dissect incorrectly, you are a sinner? Subside then." The standard Aram. translation of Onkelos (TO) presupposes the received Masoretic text, but furnishes a paraphrase rather than a translation and is guilty of some violence to the grammar.

In these circumstances, the best procedure is to adhere consistently to the received text before any departures are attempted. Surprisingly enough, this has not been the standard traditional practice. The two adjacent words *ḥṭ't rbṣ* (unvocalized) have generally been taken to mean "sin couches," although the first (vocalized as *ḥaṭṭā't*) is feminine and calls for a corresponding predicate (*rōbeṣet*); assumed dittography (*ḥṭ't [t]rbṣ*) will not solve the difficulty, since in that case the two possessive suffixes in the sequel

should likewise be feminine instead of masculine. The only way that the present reading can be grammatically correct is in a predicative phrase. "sin is a *rbṣ*," with the following possessives referring to *rbṣ*, a masculine form.

Now the stem *rbṣ* in Hebrew signifies "to couch." A pertinent noun is otherwise unattested in this language, but is well known in Akkadian as *rābiṣum*, a term for "demon." These beings were depicted both as benevolent and malevolent, often lurking at the entrance of a building to protect or threaten the occupants. Phonologically, *rābiṣum*, both noun and participle, would be matched in Hebrew by *rōbēṣ*. The adjective is independently attested. The noun is not; it would have to be regarded in the present instance as an early loanword from Akkadian. There can be no inherent objection to such a derivation, especially in the narrative before us, the locale of which is still in the vicinity of Eden, with the principal character settling eventually "east of Eden." It would thus be the *rōbēṣ* whose "urge" is directed toward Cain, but whom Cain could still thwart if he would control his jealous impulses—all expressed with faultless syntax.

Once the basic difficulty has been removed, the rest falls readily into place. The abstract infinitive *śe'ēt,* from the stem *nś'* "to lift up," is in purposeful (and long assumed) contrast to the "fallen" countenance in the preceding verse: good conduct should result in exaltation, not dejection! The whole would then be a "wisdom" motif, suitably applied to the case in question. The consonantal text, it is worth repeating, is well attested, in spite of the far-reaching differences in its interpretation. The ultimate culprit was apparently the above *rōbēṣ,* a malevolent demon in more ways than one.

7. PRELUDE TO DISASTER
(vi 1–4: *J*)

VI 1 Now when men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, 2 the divine beings saw how beautiful were the human daughters and took as their wives any of them they liked. 3 Then Yahweh said, "My spirit shall not shield man forever, since he is but flesh; let the time allowed him be one hundred and twenty years."

4 It was then that the Nephilim appeared on earth—as well as later—after the divine beings had united with human daughters to whom they bore children. Those were the heroes of old, men of renown.

NOTES

vi 2. *divine beings.* Literally "sons of God/gods." The term *'elōhīm* is here clearly differentiated from Yahweh (vs. 3). Elsewhere *E* employs the former in the sense of "Fate, Providence," and the like (see NOTE on xx 13). Here, however, the main stress is on "immortals" as opposed to "mortals."

human daughters. Literally "the daughters of man," in balanced contrast to the above.

3. *shield.* The traditional "abide in" is a guess lacking any linguistic support. For this interpretation, based on Akk. *dinānu* "substitute, surrogate," see JBL 75 (1956), 126 ff.

since he is but flesh. This clause stands for Heb. *be'šaggam*, which is obscure except for the preposition *be-*. A different analysis of the components yields "by reason of their going astray [he is but flesh]." But the first interpretation is superior, though still highly uncertain.

4. *Nephilim.* Named also as a giant race in Num xiii 33. There, however, the context implies that the people found by the spies were like the very Nephilim of old.

united with. Literally "came to," in the idiomatic sense of "cohabited with." This idiom appears to match the circumlocution used in iv 1.

Actually, however, there is one outstanding difference. Whereas "to have experience of" can be applied to either sex, "to come to" refers in this connection only to the male who visits a woman's quarters; cf. xxx 16, xxxviii 16.

men of renown. Literally "men with a name"; cf. Gilg., Yale Tablet, column v, line 7: "a name that endures will I make for myself."

COMMENT

The undisguised mythology of this isolated fragment makes it not only atypical of the Bible as a whole but also puzzling and controversial in the extreme. Its problems are legion: Is what we have here an excerpt from a fuller account? Why was such a stark piece included altogether? Does its present place in the book imply a specific connection with the Flood? Is the stated period of 120 years meant as a deadline for mankind to mend its ways? On these and many similar points arising from the all too laconic passage before us there have been innumerable conflicting opinions, with few if any concrete gains. Of late, however, thanks mainly to the discovery of pertinent literary links, some of the scattered pieces of the puzzle have begun to fall into place. To be sure, the nature of the fragment is such as to discourage confident interpretation. But a semblance of an intelligible pattern appears to be indicated at long last.

The passage is dated explicitly to the time of the initial appearance of the Nephilim, who are described as "the heroes of old"; the LXX version translates the noun as "giants." Now Greek mythology (Hesiod, Pseudo-Apollodorus) recalls an unsavory stage in the history of the gods, which involves the leading triad of the pantheon: Uranus (Sky) wars against his children, but is defeated and emasculated by his son Cronus, who is vanquished in turn by his own son Zeus. The latter, however, must then do battle with a group of giants known as Titans, and subsequently with a particularly menacing monster named Typhon.

A closely related Phoenician tradition is reported by Philo of Byblos, in the name of a much older author, a certain Sanchunyathon. This relationship is so prominent that ultimate derivation of the Phoenician material from Greek sources has been suggested more than once (cf. E. G. Kraeling, "The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4," JNES 6 [1947], 193 ff., especially 205). It was further assumed that the biblical account under discussion may allude to a

similar commingling of primeval giants and celestial turpitude. Nevertheless, Sanchunyathon was regarded as an apocryphal figure, while the other Phoenician and Greek sources were too late to have been utilized by *J;* and so this hypothesis could not make headway.

The whole perspective, however, has recently changed with the discovery of Hittite texts containing translations of Hurrian myths. These myths parallel the Uranid cycle in such striking detail as to preclude any possibility of coincidence. Here, too, the sky god (Anu) is fought and emasculated by his son (Kumarbi), who in turn is vanquished by the storm god (Teshub). But before his victory is assured, Teshub must face a formidable stone monster (Ullikummi). The decisive battle takes place near Mount Ḫazzi, the classical Mount Casius, which is also the scene of Typhon's battle with Zeus (see H. G. Güterbock, "Oriental Forerunners of Hesiod," AJA 52 [1948], 123 ff.; cf. also JCS 5 [1951], 145). Since the Hurrian original goes back to the middle of the second millennium B.C., it has to be the source of the Phoenician and Greek versions as well as of the Hittite adaptation. (For possible Ugaritic parallels, cf. M. H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts,* 1955, pp. 4 f.) The Hurrians, for their part, are known to have utilized in this group of epics a number of Mesopotamian elements (e.g., the god Anu). The whole cycle, then, with all its bloodthirsty detail, was by *J*'s time familiar to much of the ancient world. It could hardly have been a stranger to *J* or his own immediate sources.

It is evident, moreover, from the tenor of the Hebrew account that its author was highly critical of the subject matter. It makes little difference whether *J* took the contents at face value or, as is more likely (cf. vs. 5), viewed the whole as the product of man's morbid imagination. The mere popularity of the story would have been sufficient to fill him with horror at the depravity that it reflected. A world that could entertain such notions deserved to be wiped out.

In these circumstances, the present position of the fragment immediately before the account of the Flood can scarcely be independent of that universal catastrophe. The story of the primeval titans emerges as a moral indictment, and thereby as a compelling motive for the forthcoming disaster. And the period of 120 years becomes one of probation, in the face of every sign that the doom cannot be averted. All of this accords with the separately established fact that the Flood story in Genesis, unlike its Mesopotamian analogues, was morally motivated.

8. THE FLOOD
(vi 5–viii 22: J, /P/)

VI 5 When Yahweh saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every scheme that his mind devised was nothing but evil all the time, 6 Yahweh regretted that he had made man on earth, and there was sorrow in his heart. 7 And Yahweh said, "I will blot out from the earth the men that I created, man and beast, the creeping things, and the birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I made them." 8 But Noah found favor with Yahweh.

/9 This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was without blame in that age; Noah walked with God— 10 Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11 The earth was corrupt in the view of God, and it was full of lawlessness. 12 And God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted their ways on earth.

13 Then God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them. So I am about to destroy both them and the earth 14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you shall build it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16 Make a sky light for the ark, terminating it within a cubit of the top. Put the entrance in the side of the ark, which is to be made with lower, second, and third decks.

17 For my part, I am about to bring on the Flood—waters upon the earth—to eliminate everywhere all flesh in which there is the breath of life: everything on earth shall perish. 18 But with you I will establish my covenant, and you shall enter the ark— you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. 19 And of all

else that is alive, of all flesh, you shall take two of each into the ark to stay alive with you; they must be male and female. 20 Of the birds of every kind, cattle of every kind, every kind of creeping thing—two of each shall come inside to you to stay alive. 21 For your part, provide yourself with all the food that is to be eaten, and store it away to serve as provisions for you and for them."

22 This Noah did. Just as God commanded him, so he did./

VII 1 Then Yahweh said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for you alone have I found to be truly righteous in this age. 2 Of every clean animal take seven pairs, a male and its mate; and of the animals that are unclean, one pair, a male and its mate; 3 but seven pairs again of the birds of the sky, male and female, to preserve issue throughout the earth. 4 For in seven days' time I will cause it to rain upon the earth for forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the surface of the earth all existence that I created."

5 Noah did just as Yahweh commanded him. /6 Noah was in his six hundredth year when the Flood came—waters upon the earth./

7 Then Noah, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went inside the ark because of the waters of the Flood. 8 Of the clean animals and the animals that are unclean, the birds of the sky and everything that creeps on earth, 9 [two of each]*, male and female, came inside the ark to Noah, as God had commanded Noah. 10 As soon as the seven days were over, the waters of the Flood were upon the earth.

/11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month—on that day—

> All the fountains of the great deep burst forth
> And the sluices in the sky broke open./

12 Heavy rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. /13 On the aforesaid day, Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons had entered the ark—14 they as well as every kind of beast, every kind

a Evidently a gloss, see NOTE.

of cattle, every kind of creature that creeps on earth, and every kind of bird, every[b] winged thing. 15 They came inside the ark to Noah, two each of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. 16 Those that entered comprised male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded Noah./ Then Yahweh shut him in.

/17 The Flood came down upon the earth/forty days.[c] As the waters increased, they bore the ark aloft, so that it rose above the earth. /18 The waters swelled and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark drifted on the surface of the water. 19 The waters continued to swell more and more above the earth, until all the highest mountains everywhere were submerged, 20 the crest reaching fifteen cubits above the submerged mountains. 21 And all flesh that had stirred on earth perished—birds, cattle, beasts, and all the creatures that swarmed on earth—and all mankind./ 22 All in whose nostrils was the faintest breath of life, everything that had been on dry land, died out. 23 All existence on earth was blotted out—man, cattle, creeping things, and birds of the sky; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark.

/24 When the waters over the earth had maintained their crest one hundred and fifty days, VIII 1 God remembered Noah and all the beasts and cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a wind to sweep across the earth. The waters began to subside. 2 The fountains of the deep and the sluices in the sky were stopped up,/ and the heavy rain from the sky was held back. 3 Little by little the waters receded from the earth. /By the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters had diminished so that 4 in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the Ararat range. 5 The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the peaks of the mountains became visible./

6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the hatch of the ark that he had made, 7 and released a raven; it went back and forth waiting for the water to dry off from the earth. 8 Then he sent out a dove, to see if the waters had dwindled from the ground.

b LXX, and others, read "and every winged bird."
c See NOTE.

9 But the dove could not find a place for its foot to rest on, and returned to him in the ark, for there was water all over the earth; so putting out his hand, he picked it up, and drew it inside the ark toward him. 10 He waited another seven days and again released the dove from the ark. 11 The dove returned to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a plucked olive leaf! Noah knew then that the waters had dwindled from the ground. 12 He waited yet another seven days and released the dove; it did not return to him again.

13 /In the six hundred and first year [of Noah's life],[a] in the first month, on the first day of the first month, the waters had begun to dry from the earth./ Noah removed the covering of the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was drying. /14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

15 Then God spoke to Noah, saying, 16 "Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives. 17 Bring out with you every living being that is with you—all flesh, be it bird or cattle or any creature that creeps on earth—and let them swarm on earth, and breed and increase on it." 18 So Noah came out, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives. 19 And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird—everything that stirs on earth—left the ark, group by group./

20 Then Noah built an altar to Yahweh and, choosing from every clean animal and every clean bird, offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 As Yahweh smelled the soothing odor, he said to himself, "Never again will I doom the world because of man, since the devisings of man's heart are evil from the start; neither will I ever again strike down every living being, as I have done.

> 22 So long as the earth endures,
>   Seedtime and harvest,
>   Cold and heat,
>   Summer and winter,
>   And day and night
>   Shall not cease."

[a] LXX supplies the required text, cf. vii 11.

NOTES

vi 5. *Yahweh*. A clear sign in this composite account that the passage stems from *J*.

6. *regretted*. The Heb. stem *nḥm* describes a change of mind or heart, either in an intransitive sense (as here and in 7), or transitive "to comfort."

8. *found favor with*. Literally "won favor (not 'grace') in the eyes of," cf. Akk. *īnam maḫārum* "to receive the eye, attract, please." The Heb. idiom is highly flexible and varies in shading from context to context, as will be apparent from later occurrences; cf. pp. LXVII f.

9–12. A long consecutive passage from *P*. The typical introductory *tōlᵉdōt* refers to Noah's sons (10). The intervening notice is parenthetic.

9. *in that age*. The traditional rendering "in his generations" is mechanical and obviously unsuitable. It has been proposed to emend the texts *bdrTyw* to *bdrKyw* "in his ways," with allusion to such passages as Deut xxxii 4; Ezek xxviii 15; and Ps cxix 1. The change of a single letter would not be major. Nevertheless, the close parallel in vii 1 (*J*) argues in favor of the received text. The difficulty is largely translational. Heb. *dōr*, in common with its Sem. cognates, signifies "duration, age span"; the meaning "generation" (in the current sense) is secondary. And since the possessive pronoun of Hebrew often corresponds to our definite article or demonstrative pronoun (and vice versa), the present form stands for "in his times, in that age."

10. *Japheth*. It may be of interest that the apparently identical Greek name *Iapetos* is borne by one of the Titans in a context that could be indirectly related to that of vi 1–4; see COMMENT *ad loc.*

11. *in the view of*. The Heb. prepositional term *lipnē* means literally "to the face of." Its normal connotation is either spatial ("in front of") or temporal ("before"). There is, however, still another important meaning which the customary translation "before" can only distort. What is involved in such instances is the attitude of the party concerned, in terms of judgment, will, approval, and the like; cf. vii 1, and see also x 9, xvii 18, xxvii 7 (followed by a temporal *lipnē*), xliii 33. Not infrequently, *lipnē Yahweh* is like our *deo volente;* cf., for example, the four co-ordinate instances in Num xxxii 20 ff. In the present passage the indicated meaning is: according to God's (regretful) conclusion; in vii 1, the equally plain sense is: in my approving view; cf. pp. LXVII f.; cf. the Akk. idiom *pānušuma* "if he chooses."

lawlessness. Heb. *ḥāmās* is a technical legal term which should not be automatically reproduced as "violence"; cf. xvi 5.

13. *I have decided.* Literally "it is in front of me."

14. The Babylonian Flood hero Utnapishtim receives his instructions in a dream.

gopher. The timber in question has not been identified.

compartments. Literally "cells." It is sometimes argued that Heb. *qinnīm* should be repointed as *qānīm* to yield "reeds," on the mistaken assumption that "reed hut—wall" in the pertinent Gilg. passage (Tablet XI, lines 21 f.) shows the material that was used in the construction of the ark. The sense of that passage, however, is altogether different. The reed hut is the venerated shrine in which the Flood hero received his instructions from the friendly god Ea.

pitch. The same substance and the cognate term for it are found in the corresponding cuneiform passage.

15. The stated dimensions (approximately 440 × 73 × 44 feet) suggest a vessel of some 43,000 tons; cf. A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels,* 1946, p. 236.

16. *terminating.* For similar technical use of the verb, see Deut xxvi 12. The specific detail remains obscure.

17. *everywhere.* Literally "under the sky."

18. *covenant.* A solemn agreement between two parties providing sanctions in the event of non-compliance.

19. *all else that is alive.* The definite article in Heb. (here in *haḥay*) often contrasts the defined thing with the preceding; cf. xiv 16.

two of each. This number is invariable with *P. J* specifies seven pairs of all animals that are ritually clean (cf. vii 2) and one pair of those that are unclean.

stay alive. Also in vs. 20; not "maintain life." This is another instance of the intransitive Hiphil (cf. iii 6); the causative sense is generally expressed by the Piel (cf. vii 3); cf. p. LXVIII.

21. *food that is to be eaten.* Necessarily, not "food that is eaten, edible," since the inedible kind would not be called food. The Heb. form is capable of either nuance; cf. Lev xi 34.

vii 1. *I found to be truly righteous.* On the force of Heb. *lipnē* cf. NOTE on vi 11.

2-3. Were the aquatic creatures left out because they were immune from the Flood?

6. *in his six hundredth year.* Cf. vs. 11, from the same hand (*P*). The Heb. construction with *ben-* "son of," i.e., "participant in," can be either cardinal or ordinal.

9. *[two of each].* If this statement came from *J,* it would be at variance with *J*'s figures elsewhere in this account; the words are attributed, therefore, to a later redactor who sought to bring the passage into harmony with *P.* The same would apply to the use of Elohim in this verse rather than Yahweh; but the latter reading is given by Sam., Syr., and Vulg.

(manuscripts). Some of the critics regard all of vss. 8–9 as a later addition.

12. *Heavy rain.* Heb. *gešem,* unlike *māṭār,* signifies abnormal rainfall; cf. also viii 2. The period of forty days is a feature of *J.*

16. *comprised.* Literally "came as." The final clause is from *J* (note "Yahweh"); these words may have stood originally after vs. 10.

17. *forty days.* LXX adds "and forty nights"; the whole phrase, however, was probably carried over from vs. 12.

18. *swelled.* Literally "grew mighty/mightier"; a slightly different nuance ("the crest reaching") is found in vs. 20.

21. *that had stirred.* Here the Heb. verb refers to all life in general, and not merely reptiles; see NOTE on i 28, and cf. viii 17.

22. *the faintest breath of life.* Literally "the breath of the spirit of life."

23. *was blotted out.* The traditional vocalization takes the verb as active. Taken literally, "he blotted out" would leave the pronoun without antecedent. The passive form, however, would be made up of exactly the same consonants (*wymḥ*). Moreover, Hebrew often employs actives in an impersonal sense (cf. ix 6). Either way, therefore, the translation here given may be safely adopted.

viii 1. *subside.* The pertinent Heb. verb is isolated in this account and rare elsewhere.

4. *the Ararat range.* The terminology ("mountains of Ararat") alludes clearly to range as opposed to a particular peak. For the significance of this location see the COMMENT on Sec. 6.

6. *forty days.* In the original narrative by *J* this was the full length of the Flood; cf. vii 4. In the present sequence, however, the text appears to refer to an interval following the specific date just given in vs. 5 (*P*).

9. *its foot.* Literally "flat part, sole of its foot."

13. The Heb. stem for "to be dry" (*ḥrb*) denotes "to be or to become free of moisture"; complete dryness is signified by *ybš* (14).

17. *on it.* MT repeats "on the earth."

19. LXX has here the preferable reading: "All the beasts, all the cattle, all the birds, and all the creeping things on earth" (cf. vii 21).

21. *doom.* Heb. uses the Piel form of the stem *qll,* which denotes not so much "to curse" as "to belittle, slight, mistreat," and the like.

from the start. Literally "from his (i.e., man's) childhood/youth." This is ambiguous because we are not told whether what is involved is the early age of mankind as a whole, or that of each individual. In xlvi 34 the same term is applied by Jacob's sons both to themselves and to their ancestors, which can best be reflected in English by "from the beginning." The same kind of neutral phraseology commends itself in this instance.

COMMENT

The received biblical account of the Flood is beyond reasonable doubt a composite narrative, reflecting more than one separate source. One of the sources goes back to P, and is easy enough to identify except for a clause or two. But the identity of the narrator or narrators other than P has caused considerable trouble and debate. Nevertheless, if one is prepared to overlook a few highly technical details—as one must in a comprehensive study—it should not be too hazardous to accept J as the only other author involved.

More serious for our immediate purposes is the fact that the respective versions of P and J have not been handed down in connected form, as was the case, for example, with Sec. 1 (P) and Sec. 2 (J). Here the two strands have become intertwined, the end result being a skillful and intricate patchwork. Nevertheless—and this is indicative of the great reverence with which the components were handled—the underlying versions, though cut up and rearranged, were not altered in themselves. The upshot is that we are now faced not only with certain duplications (e.g., vi 13–22 : vii 1–5), but also with obvious internal contradictions, particularly in regard to the numbers of the various animals taken into the ark (vi 19–20, vii 14–15 : vii 2–3), and the timetable of the Flood (viii 3–5, 13–14 : vii 4, 10, 12, 17, viii 6, 10, 12).

To show the diverging accounts at a glance is not a simple task. A number of modern treatments resort to the expedient of reshuffling the text, but this does violence, in turn, to a tradition that antedates the LXX translation of twenty-two centuries ago. The arrangement followed here reproduces the exact order of the received ("Masoretic") text. At the same time, however, everything that can be traced to P has been placed between diagonals. This way the two components can be distinguished at a glance, or they may be followed consecutively if one wishes to do so. No attempt, however, has been made to mark in J the possible ministrations of R(edactor), in the few instances where such "joins" appear to be indicated; minimal remarks on this subject have been included in the NOTES.

That the biblical account as a whole goes back ultimately to Mesopotamian sources is a fact that is freely acknowledged by most modern scholars; see the detailed discussion in Heidel's *Gilgamesh*

Epic . . . , pp. 224–89. But the actual ties are more complex than is generally assumed.

The primeval Flood is echoed in a variety of cuneiform sources; cf. S. N. Kramer, *From the Tablets of Sumer*, 1956, pp. 176 ff. The most extensive prototype, and the best known by far, is found in Tablet XI of the Gilgamesh Epic. It is with this celebrated narrative that the biblical account has most in common.

In both instances there is a Flood hero who has been singled out for deliverance from the impending universal catastrophe. Each is told to construct an ark according to detailed specifications. There follow related descriptions of the elemental cataclysm, the annihilation of all life outside the ark, and the eventual grounding of the strange vessel on top of a tall mountain. Both Noah and Utnapishtim, his Babylonian counterpart, release a series of birds at appropriate intervals to test the subsidence of the waters; each account mentions a dove and a raven. Lastly, when dry land has reappeared in the now desolate world, each principal gives expression to his boundless relief through a sacrifice of humble thanksgiving.

So much correspondence in over-all content is inescapable proof of basic interrelationship. There are, however, also significant differences in detail. The biblical Flood, as was noted earlier (see COMMENT on Sec. 7) is given strong moral motivation, whereas the cuneiform version—at least the one that is incorporated in the Gilgamesh Epic—fails to suggest a plausible cause; one might ascribe the awesome interlude to mere whims of heaven. There are, furthermore, dissimilarities with respect to the occupants of the two arks (the Mesopotamian personnel includes "all the craftsmen") and the order of the test flights (raven–swallow–dove in Gilg.). Above all, there is the immediately apparent difference in names: Noah as against Utnapishtim; the mountains of Ararat as opposed to Mount Nisir. It is thus clear that Hebrew tradition must have received its material from some intermediate, and evidently northwesterly, source, and that it proceeded to adjust the data to its own needs and concepts.

The ultimate inspiration for the Mesopotamian cycle of Flood narratives can only be a matter of guesswork at this time. Perhaps the best chance of a likely solution lies in the recent disclosures concerning the geological background of Lower Mesopotamia (cf. J. M. Lees and N. L. Falcon, "The Geological History of the Mesopotamian Plains," *Geographical Journal* 118 [1952], 24–39). It now ap-

pears that not very long ago, as geological ages are reckoned, waters from the Persian Gulf submerged a large coastland area, owing probably to a sudden rise in the sea level. If that rise was precipitated by extraordinary undersea eruptions, the same phenomenon could also have brought on extremely heavy rains, the whole leaving an indelible impression on the survivors. All this, however, must remain in the realm of speculation.

9. BLESSING AND COVENANT
(ix 1–17: *P*)

IX [1] God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fertile and increase and fill the earth. [2] Dread fear of you shall possess all the animals of the earth and all the birds of the sky—everything with which the ground is astir—and all the fishes of the sea: they are placed in your hand. [3] Every creature that is alive shall be yours to eat; I give them all to you as I did with the grasses of the field. [4] Only flesh with its lifeblood still in it shall you not eat. [5] So, too, will I require an accounting for your own lifeblood: I will ask it of every beast; and of man in regard to his fellow man will I ask an accounting for human life.

> [6] He who sheds the blood of man,
> By man shall his blood be shed;
> For in the image of God
> Was man created.
> [7] Be fertile, then, and increase,
> Abound on earth and subdue[a] it."

[8] God said to Noah, and to his sons also: [9] "Furthermore,[b] I now establish my covenant with you and with your offspring to come, [10] and with every living being that was with you: birds, cattle, every wild animal that was with you, all that came out of the ark—[c]every living thing on earth.[c] [11] And I will maintain my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a Flood; neither shall there be another Flood to devastate the earth.

[a] So LXX (manuscripts), reading *ur^edū*, cf. i 28; Heb. *ur^ebū* (dittography).
[b] Literally "And I" (emphatic).
[c-c] LXX omits.

12 "And this," God said, "is the sign of the covenant that I institute between me, and you and every living being along with you, for all ages to come: 13 I have placed my bow in the clouds, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, 15 I will recall the covenant which is in force between me, and you and all living beings comprising all flesh, so that waters shall not again become a Flood to destroy all flesh. 16 As the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the eternal covenant between me[a] and every living being, comprising all flesh that is on earth. 17 That," God told Noah, "shall be the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is on earth."

[a] So LXX; MT has "God."

NOTES

ix 1. The statement begins with one of *P*'s favorite phrases; cf. i 28.

2. *Dread fear.* Literally "the fear and the dread," another example of hendiadys.

is astir. The verbs *rmś* (cf. i 21) is used here in its broader sense of "to move, have motion." In the next verse, the corresponding noun *remeś* is employed for animal life in general, as a new source of food for man who will now be carnivorous. The Akk. cognate stem *namāšu* shares the same range of meaning.

4. *flesh. P*'s term for "mortals."

with its lifeblood. Literally "whose blood is in the/its being."

5. *in regard to his fellow man.* Literally "from the hand of man his brother," i.e., one another. Significantly, the principle that animals are held accountable for homicide is found also in the Covenant Code, Exod xxi 28.

7. *Abound.* The normal sense of Heb. *šrṣ* is "to swarm, teem with."

subdue. Heb. repeats "increase" from the first half of the verse.

9. *covenant.* On the institution in general see G. E. Mendenhall, BA 17 (1954), 50–76; for the Heb. term see NOTE on xv 18.

10. The absence of the concluding phrase in LXX may imply a marginal gloss in MT. Yet such a recapitulation is entirely in order and should not be automatically ruled out.

11. *maintain.* Heb. uses here the same stem as in vss. 9 and 17, where the translation employs "to establish." The original carries both

meanings; the translation, however, has to distinguish between the initial act and the subsequent renewals.

15. *the covenant which is in force.* Literally "my covenant which is."

comprising. Literally "in," i.e., entering into the totality of mortal life on earth.

COMMENT

The Flood's aftermath in this biblical episode is much the same as in the cuneiform sources. The survivors are treated with solicitude and favored with divine blessing (cf. Gilg., Tablet XI, lines 192 ff.). There are also differences, to be sure, but these are in keeping with the ways and beliefs of the societies involved. Utnapishtim is granted immortality and settles in the region of Dilmun—or approximately the same general locality that the Bible describes as "east of Eden" (iv 16). Noah, on the other hand, must remain mortal. The sanctity of all future life is given forceful emphasis, but it is terrestrial and limited. Man's food supply, however, may now be supplemented from the animal kingdom. Finally, the rainbow is introduced as a bright and comforting reminder that the race shall endure, however transient the individual.

enjoyment—and my husband so old!" 13 Yahweh said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I really give birth, old as I am?' 14 Is anything too much for Yahweh? I will be back with you when life is due, and Sarah shall have had a son!" 15 Sarah dissembled, saying, "I didn't laugh," for she was afraid. But he answered, "Yes, you did."

NOTES

xviii 1. *as the day was growing hot.* With this short comment (only two words in Hebrew) the author evokes a complete picture. The old patriarch is resting in front of his tent on a typically hot day, when the landscape turns hazy and one's vision is blurred.

2. *he rushed.* No exertion, even in behalf of total strangers, is too much were hospitality is concerned.

3. Cons. Heb. *'dny* can represent *'ᵃdōnī* "my lord" (singular), *'ᵃdōnay* "my lords" (ordinary plural), or *'ᵃdōnāy,* the special form with long third vowel, which is reserved for the Deity, i.e., "my/the Lord," the pointing that is applied to YHWH in the received text. The versions support traditional Hebrew. Nevertheless, at this stage Abraham is as yet unaware of the true identity of his visitors, so that he would not address any of them as God; and he cannot mean all three, because the rest of the verse contains three unambiguous singulars. What the text indicates, therefore, is that Abraham has turned to one of the strangers whom he somehow recognized as the leader. In vss. 4–5 he includes the other two as a matter of courtesy. His spontaneous hospitality to seemingly ordinary human beings is thus all the more impressive. Later on, in vss. 27, 32–33, the divine appellation is in order, because by then it is clear that Abraham's guests are out of the ordinary. The present pointing was probably influenced by the explicit mention of Yahweh in vs. 1. But this is the author's aside to the reader who is thus prepared at the outset for the surprise that is in store for Abraham.

if I may beg of you this favor. See NOTE on vi 8.

4. *a little water.* Like the "morsel of bread" in the next verse, an attempt by the host to minimize his own efforts.

5. *before you go on.* Literally "(and) you shall continue later"; the initial *wᵉ-* is missing in MT but supplied by some manuscripts and reflected in the versions.

now that. Heb. *kī 'al kēn,* for which see Ehrl.

6–8. The actual performance is in sharp contrast with the deprecating references in 4–5.

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21. ABRAHAM AND HIS MYSTERIOUS VISITORS
(xviii 1–15: *J*)

XVIII 1 Yahweh appeared to him by the terebinths*ᵃ* of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of his tent as the day was growing hot. 2 Looking up, he saw three men standing beside him. When he saw them, he rushed from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, 3 he said, "My lord,*ᵇ* if I may beg of you this favor, please do not go on past your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, then bathe your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves before you go on—now that you have come right by your servant." They answered, "Very well, do as you have said."

6 Abraham hastened into the tent and called to Sarah, "Quick, three seahs of the best flour! Knead and make rolls! 7 With that, Abraham ran to the herd, picked out a tender and choice calf, and gave it to a boy, who lost no time in preparing it. 8 Then he got some curds and milk, and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them; and he stood by under the tree while they ate.

9 "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "In there, in the tent," he replied. 10 Then one said, "When I come back to you when life would be due, your wife Sarah shall have a son!" Sarah had been listening at the tent entrance, *ᶜ*which was just behind him.*ᶜ* 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having a woman's periods. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Withered as I am, am I still to know

ᵃ LXX, Syr. "oak" (singular); cf. xiii 18.
ᵇ See NOTE.
ᶜ–ᶜ Cf. NOTE.

6. *three seahs.* A seah was a third of an ephah, or approximately thirteen liters.

the best flour. Heb. *solet,* a kind of semolina.

7. *With that.* Heb. is inverted for special emphasis.

curds. Actually a type of yoghurt, Ar *leben.*

8. *that had been prepared.* Heb. uses here the active verb with impersonal force.

10. *one said.* One of the visitors now acts as spokesman, and his statement is the first direct intimation that the visitors might not be what they seemed at first.

when life would be due. Heb. literally "at about a life's interval," i.e., at the end of the period of pregnancy; cf. Ehrl.

which was just behind him. MT "he/it was behind him/it," which is far from clear. Sam. and LXX read the first pronoun as feminine; this would mean that Sarah was not far from the speaker; in Heb., however, the pronominal suffix at the end is more likely to refer either to the tent or the entrance, so that the received version is to be preferred.

11. *a woman's.* Plural in MT.

13. *Yahweh.* This time the speaker is plainly identified. Sarah's reference to her husband's age is not repeated; either the speaker or the author has chosen to disregard it.

14. *too much for.* The Heb. stem *pl'* refers to things that are unusual, often beyond human capabilities.

15. *dissembled.* The stem *khš* denotes subservience (cf. Deut xxxiii 29, Niphal) or deceit (Piel).

Yes, you did. In Heb. a reply often repeats the wording of the pertinent question or statement (cf. xxix 6); here literally ". . . you did laugh." The verbal form is preceded by *lō' kī.* The particle *kī* is, among many other things, an adversative. When it follows a positive or rhetorical statement, its sense is often "No," cf., for example, xxxvii 35, Deut xiii 10, Job xxii 2, and see KB, p. 431, No. 7; in conjunction with the negation *lō',* it conveys the opposite meaning, hence here "Yes," cf. xlii 12.

COMMENT

Chapters xviii–xix present a continuous and closely integrated narrative which, with the sole exception of xix 29, is the work of *J* throughout. The author not only maintains the high quality of the earlier sections, but introduces, in his account of Abraham's intercession for Sodom, a new moral and philosophical dimension.

The present section begins with the appearance of three strangers who materialize in front of Abraham's tent as if from nowhere. The heat of the Palestinian summer lends a dreamlike touch to the scene. Abraham is startled, but recovers quickly, and the generosity of his welcome is enhanced by his attempt to disparage his efforts. He knows as yet neither the identity of the strangers nor the nature of their errand.

One of the visitors appears to be the leader, and it is through him that Abraham extends his invitation to all three (see vs. 3, NOTE). Gradually, however, it dawns on the host (vs. 10) that the *'ᵃdōnī* (approximately "sir," cf. NOTE on 3) to whom he had been speaking is no mere mortal; and vs. 14 shows him to be Yahweh himself, so that Abraham can now address him deferentially as *'ᵃdōnāy* "the Lord." The reader, on the other hand, is made aware from the start that Yahweh is present, but not how to distinguish him from the other two. To that extent, therefore, we are made to share Abraham's uncertainty and thus re-enact the patriarch's experience. It is not until xix 1 that the narrative speaks of angels as such. By then, however, the grim nature of the errand is all too evident.

There is nothing equivocal, on the other hand, where Sarah is concerned. She is depicted as down-to-earth to a fault, with her curiosity, her impulsiveness, and her feeble attempt at deception. It must not be forgotten, however, that this vivid sketch has been colored, at least in part, by the supposed origin of the name Isaac. On this point, *J*'s interpretation is entirely different from *P*'s (xvii 17). For all that Sarah knew, the promise of a child was a gesture made by meddlesome travelers; her impetuous reaction was one of derision. This is what *J*'s play on the verb *ṣhq* plainly implies. The traditional connection with "laugh" is therefore closer in this instance than it was on the previous occasion. That neither *J*'s etymology nor *P*'s happens to be right is beside the point, since the underlying cultural context had been lost in the meantime.

22. ABRAHAM INTERCEDES FOR SODOM
(xviii 16–33: *J*)

XVIII 16 The men set out from there and faced toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off. 17 And Yahweh reflected, "Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 now that Abraham is due to become a great and populous nation, and all the nations of the world are to bless themselves through him? 19 For I have singled him out in order that he may instruct his sons and his future family to keep the way of Yahweh by doing what is just and right, so that Yahweh may achieve for Abraham the promises he made about him." 20 Then Yahweh said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so very grave, 21 that I must go down and see whether their actions are at all like the*ᵃ* outcry that has reached me, *ᵇ*or not. Then I will know."*ᵇ*

22 The men left from there for Sodom, *ᶜ*but Yahweh paused in front of Abraham.*ᶜ* 23 Abraham came forward and said, "Will you stamp out the innocent along with the guilty? 24 Suppose there are in the city fifty who are innocent; would you still level the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocents inside it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent perish with the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from you! Shall he who is Judge of all the world not act with justice?" 26 Yahweh replied, "If I find in the city of Sodom fifty who are innocent, I will spare the whole place on their account." 27 Abraham spoke up again, "Here I am presuming to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and

ᵃ MT "her."
ᵇ–ᵇ For an alternative word division see NOTE below.
ᶜ–ᶜ See NOTE.

ashes: 28 What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Would you destroy the whole city because of those five?" "I will not destroy it," he replied, "if I find there forty-five." 29 But he persisted, and said, "What if only forty are found there?" He answered, "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty." 30 Said he, "Let not the Lord be impatient if I go on: What if only thirty are found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find there but thirty." 31 But he persisted, "Again I presume to address the Lord: What if there are only twenty?" "I will not cause destruction," came the reply, "for the sake of the twenty." 32 Still he went on, "Please, let not the Lord be angry if I speak this last time: What if there are no more than ten?" He answered, "I will not bring destruction, for the sake of those ten."

33 As soon as Yahweh finished speaking with Abraham, he departed. And Abraham went back home.

NOTES

xviii 16. *faced toward.* Literally "looked down upon the face of." After "Sodom" LXX adds "and Gomorrah." But in this narrative, Sodom is used for the whole area, except in vs. 20.

17. *reflected.* Literally "said." The verb *'mr*, however, covers a wide range of meaning. The translation (cf. "persisted, replied," and the like in subsequent passages) has to be guided by the context.

18. *populous.* Heb. *'āṣūm* stresses numbers rather than strength.
For the last clause, cf. xii 3, NOTE.

19. *I have singled him out.* Another aspect of the flexible stem *yd'*; cf. COMMENT on iv 1. Here the stress is on "to acknowledge." The verse as a whole gives an excellent summary of the way of life ("way of Yahweh") that is expected of Abraham and his descendants.

future family. Literally "his house after him"; cf. *P*'s "your seed after you," xvii 7 and *passim.*

20. *outrage.* The noun *ze'āqā* is subtly distinguished from its doublet *ṣe'āqā* (21), which is construed objectively to yield "the outcry against one."

21. *I must go down and see.* For the phrase cf. xi 5.

at all. Heb. *kālā.* The same form occurs also in the sense of "destruction" (e.g., Jer iv 27, v 10), which TO applies here as well, perhaps

rightly. Some moderns would emend cons. *klh* to *klm* "all of them": "are all of them guilty?"

like the outcry. The Heb. noun (cf. NOTE on 20) is vocalized to read "her outcry" (the feminine possessive pronoun *-tah*, with the *-h* sounded). But the pronoun has no antecedent. The same final letters could stand for an archaic feminine suffix without possessive. LXX and TO read the last letter as *-m* and render "their outcry," i.e., the indictment against them.

or not. Then I will know. Alternatively, "And if not, I will find out." For a similar use of the verb, cf. Exod ii 25.

22. *the men*. This time, the two companions of Yahweh.

left from there. Literally "turned . . . and went." In this combination, the first verb describes not so much a turn as a specific direction.

Yahweh paused in front of Abraham. So the original text. But the passage is listed among the rare instances of Masoretic interference known as *Tiqqūnē sōferīm* "scribal corrections," whereby the text was changed to "Abraham paused before Yahweh," for deferential reasons. The change is already witnessed in LXX.

23–32. In this dialogue several of the recurrent phrases have been varied in translation on stylistic grounds.

24. *innocent . . . guilty*. Not "righteous . . . wicked"; for the legal emphasis, cf. Exod xxii 8.

25. *Judge . . . act with justice*. Heb. uses the form *šopēṭ* and the derived noun *mišpāṭ*. The basic sense of the stem *špṭ* is "to exercise authority" in various matters, hence "govern, decide," and the like; and the noun signifies norm, standard, manner. The legal connotations are at best incidental. The title *šōpēṭ*, as used in the Book of "Judges," has nothing to do with the judiciary. In the highly significant Foundation Inscription of Yaḫdun-lim of Mari (slightly earlier than Hammurabi) the cognate term *šāpiṭum* is distinct from *dayānum* "judge" (*Syria, 1955*, p. 4, lines 4, 9). In the present instance, however, "Judge" and "justice" can be employed in a non-technical sense; cf. also xix 9.

27. *I presume*. Also in 31. The basic sense of Heb. is "to undertake" (Deut i 5), hence also to venture, presume.

the Lord. Here, and in vss. 32–33, cons. *'dny* refers to Yahweh, although Abraham knows by now who his visitors are. The author remains consistent throughout this narrative. When he speaks for himself, he refers to God as Yahweh; but when Abraham is the speaker, the appellation is "the Lord."

33. *home*. Literally "his place," that is Mamre, cf. vs. 1.

COMMENT

The rebuke to Sarah, as the author records it (vs. 14), was enough to reveal to Abraham the true character of his guests, but not the nature of the mission which his hospitality had delayed for the time being. He now escorts the travelers to a spot outside Mamre, where the Hebron hills overlook the Dead Sea and the bordering district to the south. While his companions take the road to Sodom, Yahweh pauses to talk to Abraham. There can no longer be any doubt as to the visitors' objective. The ensuing dialogue takes place in the gathering dusk (cf. xix 1), within sight of Sodom, still lush and thriving, yet doomed to be reduced before sunrise to a smoldering ruin.

In Yahweh's soliloquy (vss. 17–19), and the colloquy with Abraham that follows, *J* appears in a new role. What the author sets down is not so much received tradition as personal contemplation. The result is a philosophical aside, in which both Yahweh and the patriarch approach the issues of the moment as problems in an enduring scheme of things. Specifically, the theme is the relation between the individual and society. For Yahweh, the individual who matters is Abraham. Having chosen Abraham as the means for implementing his will, and as the spearhead in the quest for a worthy way of life ("the way of Yahweh," vs. 19), should he not now take Abraham into his full confidence? The patriarch, on the other hand, in his resolute and insistent appeal on behalf of Sodom, seeks to establish for the meritorious individual the privilege of saving an otherwise worthless community.

The correlation between merit and fate is not a question which *J* is the first to broach. The basic issue is only one aspect of the theme of the Suffering Just, which Mesopotamian literature wrestled with as early as the Old Babylonian age (cf. AOS 38 [1955], 68 ff.); the OT has treated it most eloquently in the Book of Job. *J*'s own answer is an emphatic affirmation of the saving grace of the just. And even though the deserving minority proves to be in this instance too small to affect the fate of the sinful majority, the innocent—here Lot and his daughters—are ultimately spared.

23. DESTRUCTION OF SODOM. LOT'S ESCAPE
(xix 1–28: *J;* 29: /P/)

XIX 1 The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the ground, 2 he said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house for the night, and bathe your feet; you can then start early on your way." They said, "No, we will rest in the square." 3 But he urged them so much that they turned toward his place and entered his house. He prepared for them a repast, and baked flat cakes, and they dined.

4 Before they could lie down, the townspeople, the men of Sodom, young and old—all the people to the last man—closed in on the house. 5 They called out to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may get familiar with them." 6 Lot met them outside at the entrance, having shut the door behind him. 7 He said, "I beg you, my friends, don't be wicked. 8 Look, I have two daughters who never consorted with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please. But don't do anything to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof." 9 They answered, "Stand back! The fellow," they said, "came here on sufferance, and now he would act the master! Now we'll be meaner to you than to them!" With that, they pressed hard against the person of Lot and moved forward to break down the door. 10 But the men put out their hands and pulled Lot inside, shutting the door. 11 And the people who were at the entrance of the house, one and all, they struck with blinding light, so that they were unable to reach the entrance.

12 Then the men asked Lot, "Who else belongs to you here? Sons,*a* daughters, anybody you have in the city—get them out of the place! 13 For we are about to destroy this place; the outcry to Yahweh against those in it has been such that he has sent us to destroy it." 14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and urged them, "Up, leave this place, for Yahweh is about to destroy the city." But his sons-in-law looked at him as if he were joking.

15 As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "Hurry, remove your wife and the two daughters who are here, or you shall be swept away in the punishment of the city. 16 Still he hesitated. So the men seized his hand, and the hands of his wife and his two daughters—Yahweh being merciful to him—and led them to safety outside the city. 17 When they had brought them outside, he was told, "Flee for your life! Do not look behind you or stop anywhere in the Plain. Flee to the hills, or you will be swept away." 18 But Lot replied,*b* "Oh no, my lord!*c* 19 If you would but indulge your servant, having shown so much kindness in what you did for me by saving my life—I cannot flee to the hills, or disaster will overtake me and I shall die. 20 This town ahead is near enough to escape to, and it is scarcely anything! Let me flee there—it is a mere nothing—that my life may be saved." 21 He answered, "I will bear with you in this matter also, by not overthrowing the town you speak of. 22 Hurry, flee there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there." This is how the town came to be called Zoar.*d*

23 The sun rose upon the earth just as Lot entered Zoar. 24 Then Yahweh rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulphurous fire from Yahweh in heaven. 25 He overthrew those cities and the whole Plain, with all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation on the ground. 26 As Lot's wife glanced back,*e* she turned into a pillar of salt.

a MT adds "son-in-law"; see NOTE below.
b MT adds "to them."
c MT "Lord"; see NOTE.
d Interpreted as "Little (town)," and connected with the repeated *miṣ'ār* of vs. 20, literally "little thing."
e MT "behind him"; see NOTE.

27 Next morning, Abraham hurried back to the spot where he had stood before Yahweh. 28 As he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and the whole area of the Plain, he could see only smoke over the land rising like the fumes from a kiln. /29 And so it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and overthrew the cities amidst which Lot had lived, God was mindful of Abraham by removing Lot from the midst of the upheaval./

NOTES

xix 1. *The two angels*. This identification is meant for the reader, who knows that Yahweh stayed behind with Abraham (xviii 22) in order to tell him of the melancholy mission. The author was equally direct in introducing the other visit (xviii 1). But Lot must discover the truth for himself, as Abraham did earlier. It is only in the light of the *sanwērīm* (11), that the "men" (5, 8, 10) are revealed as angels (15). By thus viewing the action through the eyes of the actors, the spectator also is caught up in the unfolding drama, in spite of his advance knowledge.

in the evening. The southern tip of the Dead Sea is approximately forty miles from Hebron. The angels left after their sumptuous meal, hence in late afternoon at the earliest. Normal traveling time for that distance would be about two days.

in the gate. The focal point of all communal activities in an urban center like Sodom.

with his face to the ground. This is how courtiers and clients address their superiors in the Amarna Letters. In the corresponding case of Abraham (xviii 2), the term for "face" (*'appayim*) is significantly missing.

2. *house*. In contrast to Abraham's tent; cf. xviii 1, 6, 9, 10.

early. The Heb. verbal form *hiškīm* is used adverbially when coordinated with another verb, as it is here. In conjunction with *babbōqer* (27), it is not of itself "to rise early in the morning," since a second verb is implied there; cf. xx 8, xxi 14, etc. Moreover, as an adverbial complement, *hiškīm* signifies not only "early," but also "persistently, diligently," or the like (e.g., Jer vii 13, 25, xxv 3, 4; Zeph iii 7, etc.). The independent finite usage is rare; cf. 27, where the sense is "he proceeded promptly" (with the preposition *'el* "to").

No. The reply is abrupt. The angels' grim errand leaves no room for the usual amenities.

3. *urged*. Heb. *pṣr* describes various types of pressure; in vs. 9 the verb is rendered "pressed hard." For our "urged . . . on" in vs. 15, Heb. uses a different stem.

they turned toward his place. Literally "they turned aside to him," with the nuance of "chez lui"; cf. "turn aside" in vs. 2.

repast. Heb. *mištê*, also "feast, banquet" (cf. xxi 8); but here the reception is far from elaborate.

flat cakes. Heb. *maṣṣōt* "unleavened bread." The description is meant to contrast with the semolina biscuits of xviii 6; hurriedly baked flat flaps of bread are the daily fare of the region. "Unleavened" now tends to emphasize ritual rather than expediency.

4. *to the last man*. Heb. *miqqāṣê* "(even) from the fringe(s)," i.e., everybody.

closed in on. Literally "placed themselves around." The Heb. Niphal used with the preposition *'al* "upon, against" can describe hostile moves; cf. "to gather, combine against" (verb *qhl*), Exod xxxii 1; Num xvi 3, xvii 7, xx 2, and "to bear down on" (verb *kbd*); Exod xiv 4; Lev x 3 (not "to be glorified"); see Ehrl., Vol. I, p. 316.

5. *get familiar with*. The same circumlocution for sexual relations as in iv 1, but used under different circumstances.

6. *met them outside at the entrance*. Literally "went out to them to the entrance." The entrance is the doorway, which in well-appointed houses was protected by solid and costly doors; cf. 9.

7. *be wicked*. The Hiphil form without object is generally intransitive; cf. NOTE on iii 6, vi 19; see also vs. 9.

8. *consorted with*. Same Heb. idiom as in vs. 5.

9. *on sufferance*. Heb. *lāgūr* "to sojourn," cf. NOTE on xii 10. The sojourner lacked the privileges and protection enjoyed by citizens.

act the master. Heb. stem *špṭ*; see xviii 25, NOTE.

the person of Lot. Literally "the man Lot." The same idiom is used also in the sense of "X as a person, individual," e.g., Num xii 3.

11. *one and all*. Literally "whether little or big"; cf. "young and old," vs. 4.

blinding light. Heb. *sanwērīm* is a loanword based on Akk. *šunwurum*, an adjectival form with superlative or "elative" force: "having extraordinary brightness" (cf. my discussion in JCS 6 [1952], 81 ff., esp. p. 89, n. 52). For ordinary blindness Heb. employs native terms (stem *'wr*), cf. Lev xxii 22; Deut xxviii 28; Zech xii 4. But these would not be suitable in the present instance, since what is involved is not the common affliction, not just "total blindness," as the word before us is generally rendered, but a sudden stroke. And that is just what the term suggests: a blinding flash emanating from angels—who thereby abandon their human disguise—which would induce immediate, if temporary,

loss of sight, much like desert or snow blindness; the same is true of
II Kings vi 18, the only other passage where this noun is used (Elisha
and the Aramaeans). Thus the very word evokes a numinous image. It
is a matter of magic as opposed to myopia.

they were unable. Heb. *wyl'w*, which is not "they wearied themselves."
In Exod vii 18 the Niphal form describes a condition of helplessness, as
is proved by the parallel "they could not" later on (vs. 24). In all
probability, the present occurrence should also be pointed as Niphal:
*wayyillā'ū.

12. *the men.* Sam. reads "the angels," which is now appropriate; Heb.
does the same in vs. 15.

Before "Sons, daughters . . ." the text has "son-in-law," which is
immediately suspect: the singular is inconsistent with what follows
(LXX has plural), the pronominal suffix is lacking (restored in Syr.,
TJ), and above all, a son-in-law would not be mentioned before direct
descendants. The word in question is obviously intrusive, evidently from
vs. 14.

13. *the outcry . . . against those in it.* MT literally "the outcry against
them," the pronoun referring not to "the place," which is the actual ante-
cedent, but—by extension—to the inhabitants; for the noun, cf. xviii 20.
The original is self-explanatory, but in translation a concession has to be
made to clarity.

14. *who had married.* Heb. employs the agent form "takers of," which
could refer to the past (as interpreted by LXX), or (with Vulg.) the fu-
ture, i.e., those who were due to marry the two girls. The ambiguity
would disappear if we knew the technical meaning of *hannimṣā'ōt* in the
next verse: literally "within reach, present, at hand," which could mean
either pledged but still at home, or unattached altogether. The traditional
translation that has here been followed presupposes that two older daugh-
ters had to be left behind with their husbands, who had every legal right,
however, to oppose their departure. But the alternative interpretation is
by no means improbable.

15. *in the punishment.* Or "because of the iniquity"; on Heb. *'āwōn* see
iv 13.

16. *he hesitated.* The text has a pause sign after the verb. Lot is thus
pictured as hesitant to abandon his possessions.

led them to safety. Literally "brought them out and deposited them"
(hendiadys).

17. *Flee.* The Heb. stem *(n)mlṭ* is used five times in this short passage
(17–22), evidently because of its assonance with the name Lot (*lwṭ*).

he was told. Literally "he (the speaker) said"; cf. xviii 10, as con-
trasted with the preceding verse. The subject in such situations is often

left ambiguous in Heb. The same is true of vs. 21, below, but there Lot
had already addressed one of the two angels; see below.

18. *But Lot replied.* The text reads "said to them," which cannot be
right, since immediately afterward Lot is addressing himself to a single
companion. The error is probably traceable to the ambiguous *'dny*, which
must have been read as plural; cf. NOTE on xviii 3. The context, however,
favors *'ᵃdōnī.*

19. *If you would but indulge your servant.* Another nuance of the flexi-
ble "to find favor in the eyes of . . ."; see vi 8, NOTE.

20. *town.* Heb. *'īr* ranges all the way from "city" to "depository"
(cf. I Kings ix 19). The present occurrence describes a small settlement.

ahead. Literally "that, yonder."

to escape to. For once Heb. departs from *nmlṭ* and substitutes *lānūs.*

scarcely anything . . . a mere nothing. Heb. *miṣ'ār* (both times), a
skillful wordplay on the place name Zoar (*ṣ'r*). Aetiological explanations
were always popular, but seldom as plausible as this one is, at least on the
surface.

24. *sulphurous fire.* While sentiment favors the traditional "brimstone
and fire," the context points plainly to hendiadys.

25. The repeated use of the verb "to overthrow" may well hark back to
an earthquake; cf. Dr. On the problem of location see Wright (*Biblical
Archaeology*, p. 50), who assumes, with Albright, that the destroyed
cities were buried beneath the shallow waters of the southern tip of the
Dead Sea. This view has been questioned by E. G. Kraeling, *Bible Atlas*,
1956, p. 71; see also J. P. Harland, BA 5 (1942), 41 ff.

26. *glanced back.* MT has "(Lot's wife,) behind him, looked." The
verb itself does not indicate direction. Unless, therefore, something like
"(who followed) behind him" is intended, the pronominal suffix was orig-
inally feminine; cf. also vs. 17. The present translation leaves the matter
open.

27. *hurried back.* Not "rose early (in the morning)," which cannot be
construed with "to the place," in any case; some such verb as "and
went/hastened" is implied, cf. NOTE on vs. 2.

28. *smoke . . . fumes.* Heb. does not employ here its regular term for
smoke, but uses instead, both times, a noun cognate with the term for
"incense." The emphasis is thus on dense vapors, such as might be caused
by the firing of lime or the burning of fat or incense.

COMMENT

The focus of attention now shifts from Abraham to Lot, whose part in the impending drama was foreshadowed in chapter xiii and gained substance in xviii. By taking advantage of his uncle's kindness and staking out the Plain for himself (xiii 10 f.), Lot became an unwitting accessory to Sodom's guilt. The story of Lot, which is a subplot in the history of Abraham, is now coming to a close. J never loses sight of the fact that history, in the last analysis, is made by individuals. But the individual, in turn, mirrors larger issues and events.

At the present juncture, the author is leading up to the origins of Moab and Ammon, two of Israel's close kin. And since these were Transjordanian groups, J combines a popular tradition about them with a geographic upheaval south of the Dead Sea. His approach is normative, and the judgment is apparently calculated to point up by indirection the sterner moral values of Israel as compared with those of its neighbors. National history as a vehicle for a way of life remains J's central objective; and that history is at this point personified by Abraham and Lot.

To judge from xiii 10 and vs. 29 here, a major natural catastrophe must have destroyed the settlements at the southern tip of the Dead Sea some time after the patriarchal period had commenced. This could well have been an earthquake, accompanied perhaps by an eruption of petroleum gases underground. The event could not but be ascribed to the delinquency of the local population. But there was no uniform tradition as regards the nature of the offense. Isaiah stresses lack of justice (i 10, iii 9), Jeremiah cites moral and ethical laxity (xxiii 14), and Ezekiel speaks of Sodom's disregard of the needy (xvi 49). To J, however, it was the city's sexual depravity, the manifest "sodomy" of its inhabitants, that provided the sole and self-evident reason for its frightful fate.

The action is swift and grim, inevitable yet suspenseful. Nor is it surprising, given the author's insight and skill, that in the personal equation between Abraham and Lot the latter should emerge a poor second. Having met the strangers before, the reader will not need to ask how they could cover the distance between Hebron and Sodom, normally a two-day journey, in the brief interval between

midafternoon and sundown. Lot is dutiful in his hospitality. His manner with the visitors, however, appears servile ("with his face to the ground," vs. 1), as contrasted with the simple dignity of Abraham (xviii 2), and both his invitation and subsequent preparations lack his uncle's spontaneity. But true to the unwritten code, Lot will stop at nothing in his effort to protect his guests. Presently, the identity of the visitors is revealed in a flash of supernatural light (vs. 11). The angels' intercession serves to bring out the latent weaknesses in Lot's character. He is undecided, flustered, ineffectual. His own sons-in-law refuse to take him seriously (14). He hesitates to turn his back on his possessions, and has to be led to safety by the hand (16), like a child—an ironic sidelight on a man who a moment earlier tried to protect his celestial guests (von Rad). Lot's irresoluteness makes him incoherent (20). Small wonder that his deliverance is finally achieved without a moment to spare. Had the sun risen an instant sooner, Lot might have shared the fate of his wife; for God's mysterious workings must not be looked at by man.

As Abraham peered anxiously at the scene of the disaster, from the distant heights of Hebron, he had his answer to the question he had posed the night before. A pall of dense vapors was all that could be seen. All life was extinguished. The author is much too fine an artist to spell out the viewer's thoughts, and the close of the narrative is all the more eloquent for this omission.

P's one-sentence summary of the episode (29)—unmistakable in its wording, style, and approach—is an example of scholastic succinctness at its best.

24. LOT'S DAUGHTERS
(xix 30–38: *J*)

XIX ³⁰ Lot went up from Zoar with his two daughters, and settled in the hill country; he was afraid to stay in Zoar. And he lived with his two daughters in a cave. ³¹ The older one said to the younger, "Our father is growing old, and there is not a man on earth to unite with us as was the custom throughout the world. ³² Come, let us ply our father with wine, then lie with him, in order that we may preserve life through our father."

³³ That night, after they had plied their father with wine, the older one went in and lay with her father; he was not conscious of her lying down or her getting up. ³⁴ Next morning the older said to the younger, "Look, last night it was I who lay with father. Tonight let us again ply him with wine, and you go in and lie with him, so that we may preserve life through our father." ³⁵ So after they had plied their father with wine that night also, the younger went in and lay with him; nor was he conscious of her lying down or her getting up.

³⁶ Thus both Lot's daughters came to be with child by their father. ³⁷ The older bore a son, whom she named Moab*a*; he is the father of the Moabites of today. ³⁸ And the younger also bore a son, whom she named Ben-Ammi*b*; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

a Heb. *mō'āb*, equated with *mē'āb* "from father."
b "Son of my kin," equated with "children of Ammon."

NOTES

xix 30. *cave*. Vocalized with definite article to signify "a certain cave."

31. *growing old*. The inchoative aspect is necessary in order to point up the urgency of the situation.

unite with. Cf. NOTE on vi 4.

32. *ply . . . with wine*. The primary meaning of the Heb. verb is "to irrigate the ground" (ii 10), then to furnish drink to animals (xxiv 14, xxix 7) or humans (e.g., xxiv 18 f.). Here the object of the scheme is not just to make Lot drink but to get him drunk.

preserve life. Literally "keep seed alive."

34. *with father*. Heb. literally "my father," but the possessive in this case is more stylistic than proprietary. LXX has "our father," without necessarily implying a variant reading.

COMMENT

Popular tales about neighboring peoples are encountered the world over. The product of traditional rivalries, local pride, and raw folk humor, they often tend to place the neighbor's character and origin in an uncomplimentary, if amusing, light. Was the narrative before us inspired by similar considerations? What little evidence there is would seem to contradict such an assumption.

As they are here portrayed, Lot and his two daughters had every reason to believe that they were the last people on earth. From the recesses of their cave somewhere up the side of a canyon formed by the earth's deepest rift, they could see no proof to the contrary. The young women were concerned with the future of the race, and they were resolute enough to adopt the only desperate measure that appeared to be available. The father, moreover, was not a conscious party to the scheme. All of this adds up to praise rather than blame.

The account itself, of course, was colored to a substantial degree by the popular etymology of the ethnic terms for the Moabites and Ammonites. Did the derivations here recorded originate with Israelites, or with the natives themselves whose dialects differed very little from Hebrew? Such points could be argued either way, and with equally inconclusive results. More practical is the question as to why

J incorporated such a tale about outsiders in a story of his own people's past. The likeliest answer would seem to be that these neighbors were too important to be ignored. Yet there is little evidence of such prominence in extant historical records, certainly not in records that *J* could have known. *J* might have been familiar with the substance of I Sam xi, and quite probably with the background of Judg iii 12 ff. and xi 4 ff. But the folk tale before us presupposes a longer period of incubation. It may go back to the thirteenth century, when both Transjordan and Palestine were being settled by related tribes, at which time their relative strengths appear to have been more on a par than was later the case; cf. Deut ii 9, 19. *J*'s parallel treatment of the histories of Abraham and Lot is added proof that interrelationship was particularly intimate and important in early times.

In short, the anonymous Dead Sea cave with which this tale is concerned entails its own full complement of intriguing issues.