

5. In connection with these questions it is to be observed that it is of the nature of geological and archeological evidence to be always accumulating new facts, whereas a written history, based on testimony, remains as it was; and while, if false, it is in constant danger of being contradicted by new discoveries in the field of science; if true, its agreement with natural facts and archeological remains can appear only by degrees as discovery advances, while, for a time, there may be many apparent discrepancies.

According to the genealogy in Genesis, the patriarch Shem, a survivor of the deluge, lived to see several generations of his descendants. Let us suppose that in his old age he had, under divine guidance, given to one of these younger men who might have learned to use the Babylonian script, which we know was by that time in existence, a narrative of his experiences in the deluge, similar to that contained in the fifth and following chapters of Genesis. Carefully written on clay tablets afterward baked in the fire, this document might be preserved as a precious heirloom, and copies might be multiplied. Taken by Abraham into Canaan, it might become current there; and as the Canaanites probably even then possessed schools and literature, it may have been copied for their libraries, so that some of these ancient transcripts may yet be found under the mounds of Palestine. Taken into Egypt with Jacob, these ancient tablets would form a portion of the material of the great Hebrew leader in preparing, for the culture of his people in their new national departure, that great historical and religious treatise which we call Genesis. We may thus have in our Hebrew Bibles the very words of a witness of the great flood, with only such verbal changes as might be necessary to make them intelligible to the contemporaries of the Hebrew lawgivers. Only now, after the lapse of so many centuries, are we able to compare the history with what the earth has stored up of memorials of antediluvian men and of the catastrophe in which they perished. All this is so far merely imaginary; but modern discoveries of documents nearly as old have rendered it quite as probable a history of the contents of the chapters of Genesis relating to the deluge as any other that can be proposed.

Thus far we have been occupied only with the natural sources of information respecting the deluge. It may be proper now to compare these with the history as transmitted to us through the Hebrew Scriptures and also in the more elaborate polytheistic and poetical versions current in early Chaldea.