

Our Contributors,

Historical Criticism, VIII. *

Genesis chaps. 6-9.

Critics have sometimes been accused of making difficulties in the Scriptures where all was plain. The true critic never does this; but he sometimes finds problems, and then he sets himself to seek a reverent solution. The chapters which we are to study to-night illustrate this. A superficial examination of them will reveal the presence of two different hands in their composition. It has been the achievement of Historical Criticism to find a satisfactory and reverent interpretation. Scholars by applying critical methods have succeeded in separating the work of the different authors and have thereby made these chapters intelligible, and have given them a new revelatory value.

We have here two accounts of the Flood, one by the Jehovist written about 850 B.C., and the other by the Priestly writer who lived about 400 years later. (For convenience we shall use the symbols J and P for the Jehovistic and the Priestly document, respectively, and *a* and *b* added to the verse number to denote the first and second parts of the verse.)

The Jehovistic account is contained in the following verses:—ch. 6: 18; ch. 7: 1-5, 10, 79, 16b, 12, 17, 22, 23; ch. 8: 2b, 3a, 6, 12, 13b, 20, 22; ch. 9: 18, 27.

The account of the Priestly writer is contained in the following verses:—ch. 6: 9-22; ch. 7: 6, 11, 13, 16a, 18, 21; ch. 8: 1, 2a, 3b, 5, 13a, 14, 19; ch. 9: 1, 17, 28, 29.

As might be expected, there are many differences due to the different points of view of the writers, and these are full of interest and instruction. The two narratives may be distinguished by the use of the different name for God, J using Jehovah, translated LORD, and P using Elohim, translated God. The difference in the literary style is apparent, J being picturesque, flowing; P, precise and formal. J records that the flood lasted forty days and forty nights, P that it lasted one hundred and fifty days. J classifies the animals into clean and unclean, P disregards this distinction. J records the human weakness of Noah, which P omits. And P records at length the covenant between God and man, which J omits. Lastly, the conception of God is different in each. In J, God is the redeemer of man; He is near to man, and interested in his doings. He "shuts Noah into the ark," He "smells a sweet savour," and all through his history the Jehovist expresses a warm, tender, humanized conception of God. The Priestly writer on the other hand, thinks of God as the Creator of man, exalted in majesty, imposing certain requirements on man whom He formed in His image. His relation to man must be expressed in a formal covenant.

But while these distinctions are instructive, it is of greater importance to observe the essential agreement of the two accounts and to understand what we mean when we say that they are inspired.

The tradition of a great flood is found among all races except the Chinese and the Egyptians; from which fact some have hastily concluded that the flood was universal. But there is a great diversity

in the accounts. Many of them are plainly framed to account for certain peculiarities of racial character or of habitation. None except the Assyrian bears much resemblance to those in Genesis. But between the Assyrian and the Hebrew versions there is so much likeness as to lead irresistibly to the conclusion that they were derived from a common source. This is supported by the fact that the Babylonian civilization had at a very early date spread over the whole of Palestine, and even reached as far as Egypt. It seems probable therefore that the Jehovist and the Priestly writer inherited the Babylonian story of the flood. But they have retained nothing but the bare framework. The Babylonian version is, as usual, polytheistic. The flood is due to the quarrels of angry, capricious gods who are not equal to noble men. In the Hebrew version we have one God, ruling over the universe, interested in man, the creature of His hands, hating sin, but full of mercy. In this difference of spirit and contents we find its inspiration, and this, we claim, is a higher test of inspiration than mere verbal consistency and having dates, etc. all square.

In the Hebrew version we find great spiritual truths and a revelation of God's character.

(1.) We learn that there are great crises in personal and national life, when men seem to have sinned out their day of grace, when no recuperation seems possible and the only remedy is destruction and a new start. This is illustrated in history by the fall of Assyria, of Egypt, of Jerusalem, of Rome. We learn that all suffering is not reformatory but that it has a primitive element; that the wages of sin is death.

(2.) The dominant element in the universe is the spiritual. The history of the world is the expression of spiritual law in the natural world, the invisible making itself known through the visible. The laws of Nature are the media whereby God carries out His purposes and expresses His character. So that the poet, when he sees sermons in stones and good in everything, only sees things as God made them. And the Jehovist is a poet. He is not afraid to use bold expressions. He says "the Lord shut Noah in"; he means that God was the cause. So in interpreting the words "the Lord smelled a sweet savour," we must allow the writer the same liberty which we allow to other poets. We do not stumble over the words "the very stones prate of my whereabouts." We use our imagination.

(3.) Behold the goodness and the severity of God. He is distressed in heart but will by no means clear the guilty. To the merciful He will show Himself merciful, and to the froward He will show Himself froward. As a man is in heart, so is God to him for blessing or for discomfiture.

FOR DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN.

The Departing Spirit.

BY C. H. WETHERBE.

It is a marvel to me that anyone who is in the habit of carefully reading the Bible will insist that it teaches the notion that the soul of the Christian who has died sleeps in the body. I do not hesitate to say that this notion is positively contrary to both Scripture and true philosophy. Take the case of Christ at the time of his dying on the cross. He said that he commended his spirit to the

Father. Surely there would have been no intelligent sense in his saying such a thing if it had been true that his spirit would remain in his body while it lay in the tomb. If it had been a fixed fact that his spirit would go into the tomb along with his body Christ would certainly have known it, and he would not, therefore, have specially commended his spirit to his Father.

Then look at the case of the dying Stephen. He called upon his Lord, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He knew that his spirit would leave his body as soon as he died, and so he asked Christ to receive his spirit. He certainly would not have made this request if he had been divinely taught to believe that his spirit would sleep in his body.

And Paul called the body a "tabernacle," and he spoke of departing from that tabernacle when he should die. In 2 Cor. 5: 1, (R.V.) he says: "We know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved we have a building from God." He thus declared the dissolution of the body, a fact which is potent to everybody in all ages. Dead bodies become dissolved, but the believing and redeemed spirit cannot be dissolved, nor can it possibly remain in a dead body. In the epistle of James we read these philosophical words: "The body, apart from the spirit, is dead." It is when the spirit leaves the body that the body is dead. Then think of those dead bodies which are cremated or destroyed by chemical fire, reducing them to ashes; if they did possess a spirit, what becomes of it? Is it burned to ashes? Absurd! And the whole theory of soul-keeping is a most silly absurdity. It is a species of infidelity. The spirit of the true believer departs at death to be with the Lord of his life and of his love.

FOR DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN.

Bible Study: Two Verses this Time.

Isaiah 55: 8, 9; Paper IX.

BY ANNA ROSS.

Prayer at the beginning, "O Lord God, feed me with thy thoughts, and lead me in thy ways."

Verse 8. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

Verse 9. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Here are two things emphatically declared about God's thoughts—

1st. They are *not* the same as ours.
2nd. They are as much higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. Who can tell how much that is?

Now here is a most serious practical question. How shall we, with our feeble faculties already loaded with wrong thoughts, ever attain to those other thoughts which are so unconceivably higher than our own? This is a question to be fairly faced, for life and eternal success depend upon it.

We shall now be ready to thank God for verse 4. He has already "given" and pointed out to us His "Witness," from whom we shall get the very thought of God.

Here also are two things about God's ways—

1st. They are not the same as our own.
2nd. They are as much higher than

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