

THE UNITY AND HARMONY OF GENESIS 1—3

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Introduction

For more than a century now it has been customary for most OT scholars to assume that in Genesis 1—3 we have not one but two accounts of Creation. It is said that Gn 2 duplicates Gn 1, and what is more it contradicts it. It is alleged that there are objective, scholarly grounds for this conclusion. In colleges and universities, as well as increasingly in schools, this theory is taught by many as if it were a fact. This article attempts to show that the grounds claimed for the analysis into two different accounts of Creation are fallacious, and that the theory (which would not only divide up the Biblical narrative here, but would split the whole Pentateuch into four or more different sources) is therefore ill-founded.

The origins of so-called Higher Criticism may be traced back at least into the eighteenth century, but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the critical endeavour reached its high point in the work of the German scholars Graf and Wellhausen. Their theory of the composition of the Pentateuch, known after them as the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis, remains substantially unaltered and unchallenged today. In the English-speaking world it was S.R. Driver and William Robertson Smith who were chiefly responsible for the spread and acceptance of these critical views, and Driver's book the **Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament** remains the standard work on the subject.

At the same time, not all scholars have agreed on this four-document division of the Pentateuch (into sources labelled J, E, P and D). In the late nineteenth century, for instance, the American W.H. Green wrote two books which criticised the work of Wellhausen in detail.¹ A British scholar, A.H. Finn, produced a very helpful book in 1917, which had a preface by the famous Bishop Handley Moule.² More recently, Oswald Allis' **Five Books of Moses** appeared in 1942, and is still in print.³ K.A. Kitchen, the Egyptologist, has defended the unity of the Pentateuch on comparative literary grounds;⁴ and R.K. Harrison surveys the whole field most helpfully.⁵ In addition, some conservative Jewish scholars have attacked the Graf-Wellhausen theory. Although recent years have seen a shift of scholarly interest away from the documentary division which so preoccupied scholars earlier this century, most liberal OT scholars assume that, in substance, the division into J, E, D, and P is unassailable.

Criteria for division

A number of criteria are alleged by the critics to indicate the marks of the different writers involved. By applying them to the text we may analyse it into its constituent parts. The principal criteria, which are said to be evident in Gn 1—3, are as follows: duplicate narratives; contradictions; the use of different divine names; different 'representation' of the deity — i.e., different ways of describing Him; and differences in literary style and 'diction' (i.e., vocabulary — different words are used for the same thing by different writers). When these principles are applied, an impressive case can be made for the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis. But, as we shall see, on close examination much that is claimed as evidence for the Hypothesis breaks down and loses its significance.

We shall examine these criteria as they bear on this particular passage in some detail, as if they are seen not to be valid, or not to apply, then the reason to allege that there are two, contradictory Creation accounts falls apart. We shall look at them under five headings:

1. The Divine names;
2. The Representation of the Deity;
3. The alleged contradiction in the place of the Creation of Vegetation;
4. The alleged contradiction in the place of the Creation of Animals;
5. Differences in style and diction.

In conclusion we shall say something about the significance of the narratives of Gn 1 and Gn 2, juxtaposed as they are, when they are not considered from the critical point-of-view.

1. The Divine Names

Different names for God are used in these chapters, which we shall refer to as A (1:1—2a) and B (2:4b—3:25), for convenience. In A we have **elohim**; in B normally **YHWH elohim**, three times **elohim** alone. What are we to make of this?

It is well known that in the Bible 'a name is not a mere label of identification; it is an expression of the nature of the bearer. A man's name reveals his character. . . . Hence to know the name of God is to know God as he has revealed himself'. Thus we read in the **Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible**.⁶ Does this explain the usage of Gn.1—3? According to the critics it does not — the different names betray the hands of different writers. But actually good sense can be made of these changes in name for God. We may discern a definite pattern right through the Pentateuch and elsewhere in Scripture. The name **YHWH (Yahweh)** is the 'personal name' of God — later on to be specially associated with His covenant with Israel; whereas **elohim** is a general expression for God or simply 'deity'. It is used when aliens speak of God, and when they are spoken to (except where the God of Israel is specifically indicated); when

His cosmic and universal character are in view; and generally whenever His special relationship with His people is not the writer's concern.

These criteria make good sense of Gn 1–3. In A, **elohim** identifies God at work in Creation, His most universal work. In B, the scene changes. We no longer have a cosmos, we have a garden, in all its detail; and we have the making of one man and his wife for fellowship with their God. What more natural than that His special, personal name should here be introduced? So it is. Yet if **YHWH** alone were to appear, the reader — at the opening of this great book — might wonder: is this the same God? Is it the Creator who here has converse with a man? So the writer wisely joins the names together, to form **YHWH elohim**.

But then we have another change, back to **elohim** alone in the paragraph dealing with Fall of the woman. Just what we might expect! Not only is an alien being addressed — the serpent — but the great sin is being committed: how could the Tetragrammaton, the unpronounceably holy name **YHWH** be used here? **elohim**, 'the deity', is distantly referred to.

Thus the different usages of names for God may be explained quite adequately without any recourse to theories about sources. It is interesting to note that it was a failure to see this significance in the divine names which set scholars off in the search for sources in the first place.

2. The Representation of the Deity

The critics make much of the fact that in B God is referred to 'anthropomorphically', while this is not the case in A. Driver lists the verbs that evidence it: 'God moulds, breathes into man the breath of life, plants, places, takes, sets, brings, closes up, walks in the garden. . . .' He concludes from this that, in B, God 'is evidently conceived as locally determined within particular limits in a manner in which the author of chapter 1 does not conceive him'.⁷ So there must be different authors at work here.

Is this conclusion necessary? First, this apparent change in representation coincides with the change in the divine name already discussed; and it is quite appropriate to it. Secondly, as some critical scholars have admitted, the simplicity of B is not at all naive — it is profound theology which is conveyed in this straightforward manner. But, thirdly, the contrast is really not so much one of **representation** as of **arena**. There is no way to avoid using anthropomorphic language of God, if He is to be spoken of at all. In A, we find Him spoken of anthropomorphically as He creates the cosmos — He speaks, sees, separates, names, makes and rests. In B, He is spoken of anthropomorphically making a garden and dealing with the man He has made to inhabit it. The terms which Driver quotes illustrating anthropomorphism in B are not significantly more anthropomorphic than the language of A — especially 'rests', which indicates a decidedly human picture of God. The difference is the object

in which God is engaged: in A, the creation of a cosmos; in B, the planting of a garden. That is the real difference.

There is no reason why God should not act on both these scales, for we know Him to be at the same time the inhabiter of eternity and of the humble heart. The writer carefully used the different divine names to bring out the different sides of His nature which we see in these successive narratives.

Finally, we must point out the most profound anthropomorphism in the whole Bible, and we find it in chapter 1! 'Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness' at least gives the impression that God looks just like a man. We can imagine how the critics would have fastened onto this verse if it had been in B!

3. The Creation of Vegetation

The critics allege that in A vegetation is created before man, while in B it is created after him. Let us examine this assertion.

The precise meaning of 2:5–7 is rather obscure, as is clear from the commentaries! There are many complicated arguments about the way in which the verses should be construed. In a nutshell, two issues are involved — the nature of the vegetation described in 2:5a, and the temporal relationship between 5a and 7a.

The critics take the phrases 'plant of the field' and 'herb of the field' to imply the entire vegetable kingdom; and they defend the construction of the verses as it appears, for example, in the RSV — with 5b and 6 enclosed in parentheses; and with 4 divided up into a colophon to A and the protasis of the sentence which runs from 4b to 7.

First, the assumption that the vegetation in question refers to **all** vegetable life is open to serious question. For a start, the creation of the vegetable kingdom in general is nowhere mentioned after 2:5 (if that verse is taken to mean it does not yet exist). The planting of Eden cannot be taken as this creation, as planting and creating are different things; and as nowhere do we hear of planting outside of Eden, and it is evident that the author is aware of plants outside the gates, for that is where the man and his wife are driven. Thirdly, the author cannot have believed the tillage of man to be necessary to the production of, say, forest trees and wild plants. Yet he gives the tillage of man as a requirement for the production of 'shrubs and plants' (5b).

Although the Hebrew words are not very clear in meaning, they both refer to smallish plants; and in verse 5 they are qualified by the phrase 'of the field'. This is also imprecise, though more common; and it generally has some reference to land under cultivation of some kind, or

pasturage — land adjacent to a town; in short, land under human control.

If we allow this fact to help us interpret the meaning intended here, we may conclude as follows. The vegetation in question requires the tillage of man for its growth, and it is related by the phrase 'of the field' to human cultivation. Consequently this must mean cultivated plants; it is they who have not yet sprung forth from the ground before the man arrives on the scene.⁸

The question remains of the construction of vv 4b–7, though it is now a less pressing question. If verse 4 is not divided and the parenthesis is removed, the simple structure of the Hebrew prose is restored and fits better into the simplicity of the Eden narrative. There need then be no contradiction with chapter 1.

4. The Creation of the Animals

As with vegetation, the critics claim that B places their creation **after** that of the man, and A **before**. In many ways this is the most important and definite point of alleged incompatibility between the narratives. According to A, the animals were created on the sixth day (1:25) just before man. It is alleged that 2:19 contradicts the narrative of chapter 1 by placing their creation later.

We should note first that the author of B was not greatly concerned with the order in which things happened. W.J. Martin has noted the phenomenon in the OT which he has termed 'dischronologised narrative'. He writes of 'passages in which there is a discrepancy between the strict chronological order and the order of recital . . . a 'harking back' technique, for it takes the form of retrospective unilinearity.'⁹ We have several examples in this passage of the phenomenon to which attention is being drawn here.

For instance, we read in v.7 that the LORD God formed man; in v.8 that He planted a garden, and then put there the man whom He had formed. Next (v.9) He made to grow out of the ground the trees. Then we learn (v.15) 'and the LORD God took the man, and put him in the garden'. Are we meant to imagine that the LORD God made the man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, kept him in mid-air while He planted the garden, then placed him there (v.9), then made the trees grow (surely a part of planting the garden!), and then took the man out of the garden and put him back into it again (v.15)? That is absurd! But we recognise that, as Keil writes in his commentary, this is 'the simple method of the early Semitic historians', and we are not surprised. It is therefore a surprise that so much trouble has come from v.19! 'And out of the ground the LORD God **formed** every beast of the field and every

fōwl of the air, and brought them unto the man. . . .' (RV). The great question is whether we may translate the verb by a pluperfect, 'had formed'; for that would happily harmonise A and B. Driver writes that this translation of the Hebrew tense construction the 'waw (pronounced 'wow') consecutive' would be 'contrary to idiom'. Is he right?¹⁰

All the commentaries and other volumes which deal with this question refer the reader back to one source — Driver's **Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew**, published in 1874, paragraph 76 Obs., which begins, 'It is a moot and delicate question how far the imperfect with waw denotes a pluperfect.' A delicate discussion follows in four pages of close print in which possible pluperfect translations of different verses are argued against. Gn 2:19 is touched on briefly, Driver making two points: even Delitzsch (a conservative scholar) rejects that translation, and there is nothing in the text to justify this change from an imperfect. Both these reasons are open to question: Delitzsch actually changed his mind, and it is only on the assumption of the Graf-Wellhausen documentary division that there is nothing in the text to require the pluperfect. If Gn 1 and 2 are taken together, Gn 1 **does** require this translation in 2:19. So Driver's argument is circular.

In fact, in the immediately preceding paragraph of the **Treatise** Driver discusses just such a situation as we have in mind here, though in his commentary he makes no reference to this earlier treatment. He is concerned here with occurrences of the waw consecutive **out of chronological sequence** — either introducing a piece of incidental information (such as 2:25, which he quotes), or of the same type as we discussed above (2:8, &c.). Essentially these are cases where association of thought, rather than of time, guides the writer in the order in which he introduces elements into his narrative. It is puzzling that scholars have not seen the relevance of this usage to our verse. Driver writes that when a writer so uses thought-sequence, he trusts 'to the reader to assign it to its proper place as regards the rest of the narrative'. In other words, if strict chronology is what the reader requires, the reader must do his own harmonising.

Driver however claims that in such cases a pluperfect **translation** is still not required, even though that might be the **sense**. But he is mistaken, as there are several examples where the standard translations do use this tense when dealing with a waw consecutive of this type. The best example is Nehemiah 2:9b, where the RV, RSV and NEB **all** use a pluperfect. The RSV translation, 'Now the king **had sent** with me. . .' is precisely the same form which is required here in Gn 2:19, 'Now the LORD God **had formed** out of the ground. . .' The **New International Version** uses a pluperfect translation of Genesis 2:19 in just this way.

We may therefore conclude that it is indeed idiomatic on occasion to translate a waw consecutive imperfect by an English pluperfect, and if

that is done in Gn 2:19 the alleged contradiction between this verse and the order of creation in chapter 1 falls away. Moreover, it will be seen too that as there is no reason to place the creation of either the vegetable kingdom or the animals between that of the man and that of the woman, their creation together in 1:16 and separately in 2 presents no problems: we have simply a more detailed account of what happened on the sixth day.

5. Style and Diction

The allegation that the writers of the different documents use differing styles and vocabularies clearly requires an examination of the whole Pentateuch to refute, but we may make some brief comments. Authors may use varying styles, and when they are describing very different events it is likely that they will do so. This applies to some extent to vocabulary as well. Further, if words are to be used to indicate the characteristics of a document, they must be both common (so that a fair statistical sample may be taken), and independent of subject-matter (which means that they must be pairs of exact synonyms). These conditions are not fulfilled by the lists of words given by the critics, and on examination many of their 'characteristic' words are actually found in verses elsewhere in the Pentateuch attributed to other writers. The unreliability of such analytical methods is demonstrated by the way in which classical scholarship, which developed along the same lines as OT criticism during the nineteenth century, has now largely abandoned the fragmentary theories of the time.¹¹

The structure of Genesis, 1—3

We may conclude on a positive note. If the criteria used by the critics of the Graf-Wellhausen school break down on analysis, and there is no need to see these chapters as containing contradictory accounts of the Creation, the question 'Do they still contain two accounts of the same things?' remains. But that was really the weakest of all the assertions, and an examination of the passage when considered as a unity is most instructive. For one thing, A is a cosmogony — it tells of the origin of the cosmos. The different elements of creation are painted in in thick, bold strokes. By contrast, B is a simple and straightforward narrative, though it conveys profound theological truth. As if with a zoom lens, we focus in on Eden and the life of the first man and woman. And, even as we do so, we are prepared for the tragedy of sin and fall which soon follow in chapter 3. So in expanding and re-stating 1:26—30, and taking us on from the creation God has deemed 'very good' to the entry into it of evil, chapter 2 forms a bridge between Creation and the beginning of history. We are firmly plugged in to the start of the long, weary but finally glorious tale which follows. all the way to Calvary and beyond.

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