

The Legends of Genesis

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THE BIBLICAL SAGA AND HISTORY

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which is found in P, was learned by the Jews at this time, and probably from Babylonia. The progress represented by this learned spirit as compared with the simplicity of former times is undeniable, even though the products of this learning often fail to appeal to us. It is probably characteristic of the beginnings of "universal history" that such first great historical constructions as we have in P deal largely with mythical or legendary materials, and are consequently inadequate according to our modern notions. In this respect P may be compared to Berossus.

The emphasis laid by P upon the Sabbath, the prohibition of bloodshed and circumcision, is also comprehensible to us in the light of this period: the epoch in which everything depended on the willingness of the individual emphasised the religious commandments which applied to the individual. Indeed it may be said, that the piety of the patriarchs, who are always represented as *gerim* (strangers), and who have to get along without sacrifices and formal ceremonies, is a reflexion of the piety of the exile, when those who lived in the foreign land had neither temples nor sacrifices.

P's religious criticism of mixed marriages also, especially those with Canaanitish women, whereby the blessing of Abraham was forfeited (xxviii. 1-9) connect with the same time, when the Jews, living in the Dispersion, had no more zealous desire than to keep their blood and their religion pure.

Much more characteristic than these evidences taken from Genesis are the others derived from the legal sections of the following books. Finally there: is to be added to all these arguments the late origin of the style of P¹. And in accordance with this the fixing of the date of P as coming from the time of the exile is one of the surest results of criticism.

We need not attempt to determine here in just what century P wrote; but this much may be said, that the Law-book of Ezra, in the opinion of many scholars, upon which the congregation took the oath in 444, and in the composition of which Ezra was in some way involved, was P. Hence we may place the composition of the book in the period from

¹ Wellhausen, *Prologomena*, p. 393, ff. Ryssel, *De elohista pentateuchici sermone*, 1878. Giesebrecht, *ZAW*, 1881, p. 177 ff. Driver, *Journal of Philology*, 1882, p. 201 ff.

