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Abstract: This two-part series discusses higher criticism and the names and titles of God. The first part begins the series.

The "Higher Criticism" and the Variant Names for God in the Bible

BY ROBERT C. WEBB

I

As stated in a previous article, the so-called "higher criticism" of the Bible—which is to say the scheme having as its direct object and result, in many minds, the discrediting of claims of authority or divine origin of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures—begins with the allegation that the differing designations for the Divine Name in Genesis I and II indicate diverse origins for these two chapters, and, following on the same principles throughout the earlier books of the Bible, also several separate "documents" that have been clumsily pieced together by some "redactor" at a comparatively recent date. Upon this apparently innocent fact, also, is based the entire fabric of the system which attempts to prove from "internal evidences" that the Scriptures are not, as formerly believed, either divine, authoritative or even historical in any correct sense, and that the religion of the Jews, and the "god of the Jews"—to use a term now familiar in "scholarly" literature—are merely "developments" of ideas common to all Semitic peoples. Here the zoological hypothesis of descent, or "evolution", plays an ambitious and conspicuous part, particularly when arguments for "late dates" are desired, and is advocated as the "proved method" of God's activities, both creative and "providential". If all this is true, and has been so demonstrated, we can do no more, of course, than regretfully acknowledge our defeat. But it has not been demonstrated, nor even supported by such arguments and evidences as should warrant us in accepting it as even a "possible alternative conclusion".

The first and second chapters of Genesis positively do not use "different divine names", as the "higher critics" allege, nor even such diverse designations for Deity as to warrant the supposition that the alleged different authors of these two chapters held any such radically diverse conceptions of God, and of His relations to creation and to humanity, as would justify the conclusions of the "critics". In addition to this fact, an "alternative explanation" of the apparent differences in the "names" used may be drawn from the text itself.

In the first chapter of Genesis, and through the third verse of the second chapter, as even a reader of the English Bible may

discern, the Creator is called simply "God", a word representing the direct translation of the Hebrew *Elohim*, a noun plural in form, but used with singular verbs. In the second chapter, beginning with the fourth verse, and going on through the 23d verse of the third chapter, the double name "Lord God" is found, always as the subject of a verb, except in the two instances in the 8th verse of the third chapter. This double name represents the Hebrew words *Jehovah Elohim*, the literal translation of which is "Jehovah-God", the first word of the combination being a proper noun, indicating the "ineffable name" of God (*Jehovah, Jehovih, Yehowah* or *Yahweh*), and the second the most representative and oftenest-used correspondent of the English word "god". As with the usage of this English word, the Hebrew *Elohim* is not a proper name, except when used to designate the infinite Creator, who, in strict consistency, has no name, or whose name must not be spoken, even if declared. Thus, when used alone, as in the first chapter of Genesis, or with the name *Jehovah*, or the title *Adonai* ("lord"), as in a few instances, it is equivalent to the English name "God", with the capital. When used with other names, either in compound or in apposition, or alone, when in association with such words as "heathen", etc., it means "god" or "gods", "divine beings" or objects of worship in any designated connection. An eminent example of this usage is found in I Kings xi:33, ("they * * * have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon"), in which the objects of the verb "worshipped" may be thus partially transliterated for the information of the reader: *l (h) Ashtoreth elohe(y) Tsidonin, li Kmosh elohe(y) Moaab, ul. Milkom elohe(y) beni-(g)Ammon.*¹

In order to derive a really critical idea of the very condition found in the use of "differing names" in the first two chapters of Genesis, it is in place to indicate briefly the conceptions of Deity, as opposed to deities, which held among Semitic nations, as, indeed, among ancient peoples in general. In the writings of ancient historians, as also in many places in the Bible, the existence of heathen deities is not denied, nor is there any consistent tendency to interfere with the opinions or rites of religion of the worshippers of such "gods", except when they are brought into conflict with the "gods" of the nation in question. The ancient conception is that the god of a people should be regarded as the particular guardian of that people, their unseen genius, king or commander, who is victorious, if his people prevail, in war or is defeated, if they are conquered. The members of a tribe or

¹In this partial transliteration of the Hebrew words, the letter "h" in parenthesis indicates the guttural character of the Hebrew letter *Ayin*. The "y" in parenthesis indicates the Hebrew letter *Yodh*. The "l" before the names of these gods represents the particle having the general meaning "to", which here follows the verb meaning to "worship". The word *Elohim* is here modified into its "construct" form, *Elohe*, which means, literally, "god-of".

nation were inevitably associated with their god, who, in some aspects of the matter, might be considered to be the "personification" of the tribe itself. Thus, a man could not change his religion without also changing his national or tribal allegiance. The god of the tribe was not regarded as the Supreme Being, although he was considered to be sovereign within his own boundaries, or over his own people. There seems to have been a distinction, also, between the god-ideas of nomadic tribes and those of settled and civilized nations. Among Semites of the latter class the god was familiarly known under such title as Baal or Ba'l, which has the general meaning "owner", "possessor", "landlord", etc.—the word also means "husband" in other connections, sometimes also as a divine title.² Such designations as "king" are also common, as seen in the supposed names of heathen deities in the Bible, such as Milcom, Malcham, Molech, etc., variations of the word *melek*, "king". The Tyrian Bel was also known as *Melcarth*, "king of the city". As a nation grew greater its god, of course, increased in importance, but the idea of an infinite and eternal deity was very rare, except among philosophers or other people of high reflective intelligence. Thus, as seems well supported by recent investigations, the ancient heathen Arabs, while depending upon their own tribal deities for the protection of their tribes, etc., were wont to ascribe control of the weather and the forces of nature in general to Allah, the God of Heaven, who may be said to correspond in many ways with the *El Shaddai* of the Bible. Thus, as may be understood, the religion of the Bible had as its principal thesis the assertion of the claims of God Almighty, as against those of all "other gods" whatever, just as the religion of Muhammad, himself greatly under the influence of Jewish and Christian traditions, emphasized the claims of Allah, to the exclusion of all tribal gods and "baals"—the "gods many and lords many".

In the course of the development of religious thought and institutions, particularly under the influence of people of reflective intelligence, we find that, among even the most widely separated peoples, one kind of polytheism arose from the discrimination of separate deities in control of the several natural forces, departments of life and effort, such as warfare, agriculture, etc.

²The common Semitic belief in the local, or restricted, powers of their several gods, or *Baalim*, is well exemplified by the passage in I Kings xx:22-30, in which, as recorded, the King of Syria was advised to seek battle with the Israelites "in the plain", on the ground that "their gods are gods of the hills". We might reasonably conclude that this supposition was based on the report that Jehovah had His special residence at Mount Sinai or Horeb. In spite, however, of the fact that sundry "critics" insist that Jehovah is merely one of these locally dwelling Semitic deities, we find that the idea is definitely repudiated, and God promises His people a victory, to demonstrate the fallacy, and that "ye shall know that I am the Lord". Nevertheless, the usual Semitic superstition was so familiar to the Israelites that, as recorded, they seemed unable to comprehend the idea of an Infinite Being who is "God among the gods", and showed a constant tendency to have recourse to the *Baalim*. This is a perfectly consistent explanation for their constant recorded lapses into idolatry.

But, often, as among the ancient Hindus, there is, even with belief in a most populous pantheon, an ancient and persistent tendency to regard the separate gods as so many manifestations of one original and primitive Power. We have, therefore, what is usually known as "henotheism", the concept of one god in many forms, or in many functions, rather than "monotheism", or the assertion of one god supreme above all forces of nature, etc., and, if acting through the agency of other superhuman beings, acting always as their superior and commander, who is unspeakably above them all. Another variety of polytheism comes with the attempt to reconcile the conflicting claims of numerous local, or tribal, deities, so as to include them in a national pantheon. There is much of this sort of thing in the religion of ancient Egypt. It appears also when men of one nation attempt to recognize their own gods in the deities of another. Thus, Herodotus, in describing the religion of the Egyptians, gives the names of the Greek gods to their gods. So, also, the Romans, on their emergence into power and importance, sought to identify the members of their own pantheon with those of the Greek.

One thing that is fairly certain about most ancient and "heathen" systems of religion is the general failure to identify any of the members of an official pantheon with the Creator of the universe. Thus, among the Greeks and Romans, there was no definite ancient tendency to ascribe Creatorship to Zeus or to Jove. With them the origin of things lay in a vague line of fables, in which personifications of "time", "heaven", and other ultimate facts cooperated in forming the worlds. With the Hindus the old Vedic god Indra was not identified with the Creator, nor were any of the other deities so honored. Later, with the rise of philosophical tendencies, there appeared the three rivals for Creatorship, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, whose conflicting claims were "reconciled" by the theologians in the popular *trimurti*, which is a very different concept from that involved in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, no matter how much the idea of a "triunity" may appear in both. With the philosophers, also, the three rival gods were resolved into three differing manifestations of the same absolute and original agency called by them Brahman. They taught, therefore, that, from the original "formless and passionless" Being was derived the existent universe under the name of Brahma, or, rather, that the universe formed by or from him contained the two great dominating elements controlled by Vishnu as the Preserver and by Shiva as the Destroyer. To this day, however, there are the rival sects in India of the Vaishnavas, or worshippers of Vishnu as the Supreme Being, and of the Shaivas, or worshippers of the supreme Shiva.

In fact, as the science of comparative religion seems to affirm, there are, historically speaking, two distinct eras or layers

of thought upon matters connected with the Creation. The first is the mythological, in which vague fables of the "first generation of gods" is relied upon to stop the questionings of the curious, just as the fantastic stories usually given in treatises on "mythology" were supposed to account for certain local sanctities or certain forms of religious observance. The second is the philosophical, which, in general, takes the data of popular religious conceptions and reduces them to a formal system. Thus, the deities of the older pantheons were very generally "spiritualized" into simple "hypostases" of supposed ultimate energies and existences. From such a tendency we have the famous "Hymn to Zeus" written by Kleantes, and containing the passage, "We are also his offspring", quoted by St. Paul at Athens (Acts xvii). Similarly, also, the famous "Chaldean account of Genesis" first brought to light by the late George Smith, has been placed by some competent scholars in precisely the same category. On this point Prof. Sayce writes:

"It [the Babylonian creation story] was an attempt to throw together in poetic form the cosmological doctrines of the chief Assyrian and Babylonian schools and combine them into a connected story. But the attempt breathes so thoroughly the air of a later philosophy which has reduced the deities of earlier belief to mere abstractions and forces of nature, that I much doubt whether it can be assigned to an earlier date than the seventh century B. C. The materials incorporated into it are doubtless ancient, but the treatment of them seems to presuppose an age of rationalism rather than an age of faith."—*The Higher Criticism and the Monuments*, p. 62.

Now, in this point the Book of Genesis takes a complete departure from the methods of all other ancient peoples and religions. It begins with an account of the creation which is at once singularly free from the fantastic elements so conspicuous in ancient mythological "cosmogonies", as well as from the equally fantastic refinements of mere speculative or philosophical formulations. It avoids all these unsatisfactory and inconclusive elements by postulating, at the start, an Infinite and Supreme Being, who, under the name or title Elohim, manifests His power by commanding the "earth without form and empty" to assume the form and "fulness" which He had determined that it should manifest. This Creation Story, in fact, manifests the simple directness of the ancient story-teller, in its freedom from all cumbrous "literary embellishments", while, in its broad and unassailable statements, it reveals an origin other than that from which came the speculative formulations of the "philosophers". It is quite as reasonable—speaking from the standpoint of literary criticism—to see in such an account as this the "original form" of the story, later "embellished", amplified, "improved" and corrupted into the versions found on Babylonian brick tablets, as to assume that it is merely

an "expurgated edition" of some such accounts, as sundry alleged "critics" confidently assert.

More than this, our conclusion that the account in Genesis may with perfect propriety be considered the true "original version" is in perfect accord with the facts claimed in the whole of the earlier history contained in Genesis. It is also in accord with the facts known about religion in ancient times—not merely as supposed by "scholars" having special theories to defend. It begins with an account of the doings of the Infinite Creator in the depths of eternity, but, so soon as He has created the world and man in it, He becomes the Lord or Master to his creatures, with whom he speaks even as a man to men. The Infinite Creator is, in fact, identified at once with the God known, as stated, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, under the title *El Shaddai*, "God Almighty", and to Moses as *Jehovah*, "He who is". This is the reason why the name *Jehovah* is coupled with the title *Elohim* in the second and third chapters of Genesis. This coupling of the names is intended to dispose at once of all suspicion that any other "god" could possibly be identified with the *Elohim* of the Creation.

In making this statement thus confidently we are bound by no theory as to when, or by whom, the name *Jehovah* was first inserted in the second and third chapters. It is perfectly evident from the historical point of view that this name should appear there, in order to eliminate the claims in behalf of any of the "gods many and lords many" as against those of *Adonai Jehovah*. There was no claim, to be sure, that any of these "other gods" was the Infinite One, but the claim is made from the start for *Jehovah*. In the words of the 86th Psalm, "among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord". But, as recorded, Adam and Eve failed to remember—if, indeed, they clearly understood—that the God who walked in the Garden and talked with them was immeasurably exalted above all earthly beings. So, also, as the result of defective understanding, the Israelites of all times, as recorded in later books, failed to remember that the *Baalim*, and other "lords", were essentially different orders of beings from the Lord God of the Hebrews, and fell easily into the current habit of all peoples of their times of seeking the help of "strange gods", local deities, who, as asserted, inhabited the land which they had conquered. This is the reason why the name *Jehovah* appears with *Elohim* after the first chapter. And it is a reason consistent with the history of the earlier books of the Bible.

(The conclusion of this article will follow in the October ERA.)