

## CHAPTER TWO HISTORY OF THE LINGUISTIC ARGUMENT

The critical examination of the linguistic character of the Pentateuch has been carried on with a double purpose: *a.* To obtain the criteria for an analytical distribution of its contents among the various documents which critics profess to find; *b.* To fix the relative date of these documents. Whilst in the latter respect, however, the linguistic argument is no longer counted as a decisive factor, it has been elaborated for the former purpose to such a degree of minuteness, and with such consummate skill, that at present it constitutes one of the most perplexing phenomena for those who defend the essential unity of the Pentateuch.

For a just estimate of the character and force of the argument, it will be necessary to exhibit not only its historical connection with the discovery of Astruc, but also its logical dependence on the latter. The critics have gradually detached the one from the other, apparently unconscious that in doing so they have destroyed the very basis on which they rest. We must start with a recognition of the very remarkable use of the divine names in Genesis and the first chapters of Exodus. The question, what is the cause of this, cannot be ultimately decided by an interpretation of the much discussed passage, Exod. 6:2,3. If we understand it in the sense that the name Jahveh was previously to this absolutely unknown to the patriarchs and Israelites, it follows immediately that the writer of this passage cannot be the author of the Jehovistic passages which precede, unless we take recourse with Clericus and others to the assumption of a prolepsis, which, however, as Hengstenberg has shown, will not account for the facts. But when we take the passage in its other more probable sense, that God had not previously revealed to Israel those special attributes which constitute him Jahveh, it does not follow immediately, that, by this different interpretation, the interchange of both names is satisfactorily explained. To show that the writer of Exod. 6:2,3, did not absolutely deny the previous knowledge of the name Jahveh, is quite a different thing from explaining how he, acquainted with the facts, could have used both names in the course of the same work in such a peculiar manner.

In favor of the former interpretation, attention has been called to the fact, that, in the Hebrew mind, there was a very intimate connection between the name and the nature of a thing; that the name is never accidental or arbitrary, but the expression of the nature; that consequently not to know God as to his name Jahveh, is equivalent to a not-knowing of his nature as such and the reverse. Nature and name are so indissolubly connected, that, where knowledge of the former is wanting, acquaintance with the latter cannot be imagined. We must admit that there is an amount of truth in this statement: still, it is not sufficient to disprove the possibility of an external proclamation of the divine name previous and preparatory to the actual exhibition of its meaning. Exodus 3:13-15 furnishes a parallel, and shows that nothing else is intended than an announcement of God's purpose to manifest himself in those attributes of his nature emphasized in the name Jahveh, which had already existed, and been used before. As has been remarked, however, this by no means decides the bearing of the passage on the unity of Genesis or the Pentateuch. The point at issue is, whether the various theories which have been proposed by critics in connection with this interpretation can be fairly said to account for the fact, that, in certain portions, Jahveh is used exclusively, in others Elohim, whilst still others are of a mixed character. We must examine the various explanations presented, before we can have any argument, either for unity or diversity of authorship.

The most plausible theory is that of Hengstenberg, Keil, Hävernick, and Kurtz (who afterwards, however, adopted the supplementary hypothesis). They ascribe the alternation of Jahveh and Elohim to intentional adjustment on the part of the writer to the historical circumstances and contents. It is certainly true that both names are not synonymous; but the question remains, whether the difference in their signification accounts for their appearance in all the passages under consideration. It creates a strong presumption against the theory that all these writers, notwithstanding their agreement in principle, still, when they come to apply it in individual cases, differ widely. This shows that their ingenious explanations have not been suggested by the circumstances themselves, but by their own subjective fancy imposed upon them. The very grounds which should have induced the writer to choose one of the names in a certain passage can be shown to have existed for another passage, where the other name is used. Even the principle of Keil, which is that of Hengstenberg in a refined form, does not agree with the facts. The weakness of the whole theory is admitted by a man like Delitzsch. He confesses, that all the ingenuity which Keil has expended on the matter to explain the use of Jahveh or Elohim in each single instance, from their original meaning, might have been applied with the same success had the names been employed in exactly the reverse order. Both Drechsler and Kurtz have retracted their former opinion, which was substantially the same with that of Hengstenberg.

Others have considered the preference of either one of the divine names as due to the peculiarity of the speakers who are introduced by the writer. But this explanation, besides being unsatisfactory in other respects, is only a partial one; as it does not account for the same phenomenon where no persons appear speaking in the narrative.

Some have appealed to mere accident, or to a striving after variety on the part of the author. Delitzsch admits the possibility that the author of Genesis could have used both names alternately, and adduces the Jahveh- and Elohim-Psalms as a parallel. He quotes also Gen. 7:16, 27:27, 28; Exod. 3:4, and other passages. Indeed, if all the passages under consideration were of a similar character, this would be the most easy and simple explanation. But what may be possible abstractly, and even in a few actual cases, becomes highly improbable, nay impossible, when taken as a theory to account for all the phenomena from Gen. 1:1 to Exod. 6:2.

Now, if we could satisfy ourselves with one of these theories, the other evidence which the critics claim to possess of a diversity of authorship would have but little weight. It is of a strictly linguistic character; and how largely the subjective element enters into all such argumentation, needs no special proof. When taken by itself, deprived of the accompanying use of the special divine name, it becomes weak and inconclusive. More than one, to whom the internal literary evidence of analytical criticism has been presented in this light, has been astonished at the credulity of the critics and the extremely fine webs on which their structures are suspended. But here, as in other cases, the evidence is cumulative and mutually sustaining. The strength of their position with regard to the use of the divine names enables the critics seemingly to justify and commend their analytical researches to an extent and with a success which would otherwise have been impossible. Long since, traces of a peculiar *usus loquendi* have been sought, in Elohist sections specially.

We are told, that **אָחוּזָה**, **לְמִינוּ**, **בְּעֵצִים הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה**, etc., are favorite words and phrases of the Elohist; and they appear wherever the name Elohim appears, as its inseparable satellites. Proceeding

on this principle, the critics divide Genesis; and they all agree as to the main results. The bearing of this startling fact upon our question is self-evident. If it can be proved that Genesis consists of at least two documents, and that the writer of each had a plan in mind to continue his narrative until the possession of the Holy Land by the Israelites, the suggestion becomes a natural one to attempt to apply the same tests, so successfully employed in analyzing Genesis, to the subsequent books of the Pentateuch also. And, in fact, the critics claim that they are able to assign each law, or Code, to its original document; and, as far as analysis is concerned, in the main their results agree.

We do not see how the objections to the unity of Genesis on the ground just stated can be answered; neither do we know of any satisfactory answer that has been given as yet. But whilst we cannot enter upon a discussion of this matter, which would open up a field of critical research scarcely less extensive than that of our own subject, we simply wish to indicate how closely the two problems are interwoven. The treatment and solution of the one will necessarily affect that of the other. It is only within the limits to which we are confined that the destructive tendencies of the documentary hypothesis burst upon us in their full light. One might accept it for Genesis, without yielding to the critics in the least with regard to its Mosaic origin. But how can we vindicate this claim if driven to the confession, that the history of the Mosaic age itself has reached us in two distinct documents, bearing the same distinctive marks as in Genesis, and thereby proving themselves to be their continuation? And not to speak of Mosaic origin, how, and to what extent, can we claim unity for a Code that appears to be made up of at least two such documents? It is easy to see how much depends on the answer that we shall give to these and similar questions. If it should become evident that the extreme conservative position with regard to the unity of Genesis has to be abandoned, we can comfort ourselves with the thought that Moses might be, after all, the redactor, and in a modified sense the author, of Genesis. The critical attack does not reach the heart of our camp. It is different here. The vital point around which criticism has moved for several decades in concentric circles, is now made the point of a double attack along the historical and literary lines. Will it prove tenable?

Before we try to answer this question, it may be well to remark,<sup>1</sup> that the history of the linguistic argument is not adapted to inspire confidence in its validity. It was considered from the outset, even by advanced and rationalistic critics, with distrust and reserve. Apart from a few general observations in this line by Spinoza, Simon, and Clericus; apart from Astruc's theory, and the scanty remarks of Eichhorn under the pretentious title, "Proof from the Language," — Ilgen, who first introduced the terms Elohist and Jehovist, was also the first to point out certain peculiarities in style and expressions, and meaning of words; e.g., that the Elohist avoided the use of pronouns, had a tendency towards redundancy, etc. In the main, the argument was either met by direct refutation, or at least by the claim that the materials were not distinct and conspicuous enough to justify the inference of diversity of authorship and of sources. The latter was the prevalent opinion among such men as Hasse, Herbst, Jahn, Sack, and even Ewald. In 1807 De Wette declared that he would not undertake to eliminate the original source from Genesis and the first chapters of Exodus by a purely literary process. The argument found no more favor with Hartmann, who pronounced it perilous and misleading. So largely did this sentiment of aversion and distrust prevail among the critics, that Gesenius, in his "History of the Hebrew Language" (1815), disregarded the claims of Eichhorn and Ilgen entirely. The fragmentary hypothesis was in no wise favorable to the literary criticism. Vater, having established, as he thought, by other than linguistic arguments, the existence of various fragments, expended no labor on that which he esteemed himself fully able to dispense with.

In 1823 the fourth edition of Eichhorn's introduction appeared, and wrought a remarkable change in the indifference with which the argument from language had hitherto been dismissed or ignored. Gramberg worked in the line indicated by Eichhorn, and analyzed Genesis. His methods drew the assent of De Wette, and made even Hartmann less persistent in his opposition; though the latter continued to characterize the linguistic criteria as "*indicia fallacia*." In the mean while Vater's and Hartmann's criticism had this effect, that it distracted the attention of conservative critics from Genesis, and kept them occupied with the attempt to prove that the laws of Deuteronomy did not essentially differ from those of the preceding books, and that the whole Pentateuch was to be assigned to the Mosaic age. Hengstenberg, Ranke, and Hävernick, however eminent their achievements on other lines may be, did little thorough and complete work in this direction. Drechsler, though he found much to criticize in the critics from a formal point of view, did not assail their main position. In the main, critics on the conservative side were little concerned about the literary weapons which their opponents were handling with such destructive skill and agility. Herbst thought, in 1841, that he could dismiss the matter without discussion; and Welte, though not wholly omitting it, considered it to be "of very slight importance." On the other side, it was chiefly Stähelin who accomplished the work begun by Eichhorn and others. In 1831, and afterwards in 1844, he gave the linguistic characteristics of Genesis a thorough examination, and turned his attention also to the peculiarities of the Jehovist. To Stähelin's statements, very little that is essential has been added since.

The year 1844 indicated a marked change in the attitude of both parties. Kurtz applied himself to a subtle examination of all that had been claimed in support of the divisive theory, and instituted an accurate and scrutinizing inquiry into the nature and validity of the whole argumentation. His example had this good effect, that henceforth believing critics no longer refrained from meeting their opponents on this field also; though it must be added, that the battle thus auspiciously begun did not issue in their favor. The interest thus awakened, disposed believing scholars to give the matter an unprejudiced and fair consideration; and even Kurtz, who had entered the lists as a defender of the unity of the Pentateuch, was induced by Delitzsch to join the ranks of the Supplementarists. (Second edition of the "History of the Old Covenant," 1858.) But it appeared that Criticism had run, as yet, only half of its course, and could not abide long on the same level with men like Delitzsch and Kurtz. Having gradually won their consent, it now went on to gain new laurels in the construction of ingenious hypotheses. The literary argument had become stale, and could be left with the conservative critics. Hupfeld appeared (1853) with his denial that the Jehovist had supplemented the Elohist; and now not the diversity of both, but their independence of one another, immediately absorbed universal attention. It lay in the nature of the case, that Hupfeld tried to establish his position, not so much by literary criticism as by tracing the nexus of the history. Since the fall of the supplementary hypothesis, and the general acceptance of the documentary hypothesis, the linguistic argument came, if not into disrepute, at least into neglect among the critics. Then the school of Kuenen, Graf, and Wellhausen, with its revival of the historical methods of George, Vatke, and Reuss, took the lead; and, the question having been thus put on a historical basis, the corresponding literary side lost much of the attention it had attracted so largely in former days. Since then, though the critics go on to apply their criteria, and put every line of the Pentateuch to this test, little that is new has been added. Kayser, who has attempted to supply the Graf-Wellhausen theory with a literary basis, uses the argument outside of Genesis only. Kleinert speaks ambiguously of its value. Dillmann has carefully sifted the rich collections of Knobel. Wellhausen finally contents himself

with the remark, that it is settled among scholars, that the sections in Genesis which he ascribes to the Jehovist and the second Elohist (JE), are as distinct from the Elohist portions as they are cognate to each other. Neither, however, is proved, or rests on any more than the gratuitous assumption, that the literary argument has met with unqualified approval in every quarter. With how little right this can be claimed, our short historical sketch has sufficiently shown.

Before turning to the evidence itself, we must make some preliminary remarks, which shall guide us in its examination. They are chiefly the following: —

1. There must be, in the first instance, some reasonable ground why the critical analysis should be applied to the Pentateuchal Code, to justify any use being made of it whatever. If there be no presumptive evidence that it consists of various documents, it will be justly condemned as a most arbitrary and unscientific procedure to divide it into several pieces, more or less strongly marked by linguistic or stylistic peculiarities. The question is not whether the process admits of being made plausible by apparently striking results, but whether it be necessary, or at least natural, on *a priori* considerations. We might take a chapter or poem of any one author, sunder out a page, note the striking expressions, then examine the other parts of the work, combine all the passages where the same terms appear, give them the name of a document, and finally declare that all the rest constitutes a second document, and that the two were interwoven by the hand of a redactor so as to form now an apparent unity. Our first demand, therefore, is that the critical analysis shall rest on a solid foundation, and show its credentials beforehand. So long as this rule is not strictly observed, the analytical methods will be open to the criticism of having created their own criteria; so that it is no wonder, if in the end they seem to be verified by consistent or even plausible results. If we first fabricate our criteria so as to suit the phenomena under consideration, it is no longer a startling fact when these phenomena afterwards appear to fall in with our critical canons.

2. A direct inference from the principle just stated is, that the argument from style and diction has no independent value, unless the differences be so marked, and in such a degree irreconcilable with unity of authorship, that they impress any reader of ordinary discriminating literary taste at first sight. To argue from a few bare phrases and isolated words is simply absurd. The evidence, if it be valid at all, must bear out the literary idiosyncrasy of the author: it must not only be complete and manifold, but constitute one cognate whole. We do not believe that, in the light of this canon, the results of critical analysis will stand very favorably. For centuries and centuries the pretended differences were not discovered, which is a *de facto* proof that they are not of such a nature as may be rightly demanded for independent argumentation.

3. Before a fair conclusion can be reached, we must eliminate the influence which the diversity of subject-matter will always have on both diction and style. Legal language constitutes a genus by itself, and can be judged only by its own characteristics. Furthermore, it is admitted on both sides that the Elohist wrote or copied priestly, ritual law; whilst the Jehovist legislation is chiefly concerned with laying down the fundamental principles of civil life. Now, it is self-evident that the same author, writing on both lines, would be obliged to use a different terminology in each case. The ritual has its own ideas and conceptions, for which certain words are exclusively employed; and so with civil law. The idiom of neither can be expected to re-appear in the other. Only when two laws treat of the same topic, and an actual diversity as defined in the preceding paragraph exists, can we draw a

valid inference of diversity of authorship.

4. Due importance must likewise be attached to the context and the situation in which the alleged peculiarities appear. That they recur in certain passages cannot be taken as proof that these together form a separate document. On the contrary, the assertion will stand unproved so long as it is possible that other influences may have caused the appearance of such characteristic expressions in all instances under consideration. We have no right to limit the writers in their selection of phrases, or to confine them to the use of one set of words. Neither can the privilege of employing synonyms be denied them. They may consult their subjective taste, which is always more or less fluctuating, have regard to rhythm in the construction of their sentences, and in many ways be influenced by what they think conducive to fullness and elegance of diction. What the critics must show, is that one class of phenomena testifies to such a developed taste in grammar and style as would render the other class of phenomena insupposable in the same writer. And since it is not possible, in view of our partial acquaintance with the Hebrew, to determine by what considerations the writer may have been led in the use of his vocabulary, or the shaping of his sentences, we must insist upon it, that the critics on their part show the impossibility that such causes should have been at work as might account for the facts consistently with unity of authorship. We must continually remember, that in this whole matter the burden of proof lies on the other side.

5. The critics constantly indulge in certain favorite practices which strongly tend to destroy any thing objective in their argument. One of these is to take a single verse, or half a verse, or even a smaller portion still, out of its natural connection, and attach it to a section from which it is remotely separated, for the simple reason that it does not conform to their literary canons. The method looks very innocent, but it is at bottom extremely deceptive in a twofold aspect: *a.* It begs the question, for thus all traces of an Elohist *usus loquendi* may be eliminated from Jehovistic sections and the reverse; if this be allowed, the argument might as well be given up. *b.* What the critics in reality do by this method, is just by a dexterous but suspicious movement to turn in their favor what is in fact against them. That an Elohist phrase all at once makes its appearance in the midst of a purely Jehovistic environment, is a most perplexing difficulty, which cannot be relieved by declaring it the result of a variety of hands which have been at work upon the composition of the Pentateuch. For it is a sound critical axiom, that diversity of style and diction can only be verified by a comparison of lengthy passages, whose *usus loquendi* is exclusive. Isolated exceptional cases turn back upon the theory, and prove exactly the opposite; viz., that the criteria intermingle, which is tantamount to saying that they are no criteria at all. In every instance in which such a mixture appears, critics must leave it alone; and we have a right to claim it as evidence on our side. Another practice, of which we have a right to complain, is the frequent calling in of a redactor to do away with troublesome facts. When the Sinaitic Decalogue is found to contain certain characteristically Deuteronomic expressions, Wellhausen is ready to assume a Jehovistic redaction to account for it. We need hardly say, that to such cases the same maxim applies which was laid down a moment ago. To us the redactor is as yet no living personality: our belief in his existence will, to a large extent, depend on the estimate we shall put on the critical analysis. It is very obvious, therefore, that to fall back on his mysterious influence for the removal of difficulties, invokes an open *petitio principii*.

**(Footnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> The material for this historical sketch has been largely drawn from König: "De criticae sacrae argumento e linguae legibus repetito." (Leipzig, 1879.)