METHOD IN PENTATEUCHAL SOURCE CRITICISM

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Source criticism of the Pentateuch has often been a subject of controversy. Rarely have the different approaches to the topic been more clearly illustrated than by the recent publications of two of the best known British Old Testament scholars. R. N. Whybray in *The Making of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, 1987) rejects the traditional documentary hypothesis entirely, whereas J. A. Emerton in two articles "An Examination of Some Attempts to Defend the Unity of the Flood Narrative" *VT* 37 (1987), pp. 401-20; 38 (1988), pp. 1-21, equally stoutly defends it. In that scholars both past and present regard the flood story as one of the show pieces for the source-critical method, it seems worthwhile to explore the grounds for the very different approaches of Emerton and Whybray to our topic. Why is it that two such eminent scholars come to diametrically opposed conclusions? What are their basic assumptions? How do they weigh evidence? Are there any principles that all Old Testament critics can accept as a basis of discussion?

The necessity for agreed rules of argument is plain for all to see. Without such agreement every scholar will do what is right in his own eyes, and the world of Old Testament studies will disintegrate into factions denouncing each other for their alleged hidden agendas instead of attempting to refute the other side's arguments. This problem is not peculiar to Old Testament scholarship: it is equally apparent in New Testament debate. Recently E. P. Sanders and J. M. G. Barclay have urged their colleagues to weigh the strength of the different arguments with which they defend a particular standpoint. Are the arguments certain, virtually certain, highly probable, possible, conceivable, or incredible? Cur-

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2 "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case", *JSNT* 31 (1987), pp. 73-93.
rent writing tends to juxtapose arguments of very unequal weight, so that though say half a dozen reasons for a particular view may be advanced, only one or two of them may be really strong. Sanders and Barclay urge that attention be focussed on the strong arguments, and that the weaker ones, those points capable of various interpretations, should be left aside; then perhaps scholars can agree more than they do at present. Such a procedure might with profit be adopted in Old Testament criticism. Both Emerton and Whybray acknowledge the limitations of some of their arguments. It is my purpose to attempt to distinguish between the weaker and stronger arguments for the traditional source analysis, so that it will be clearer where the balance of probability lies in this debate.

Advocates of the source analysis of the flood story generally appeal to three kinds of reason for holding that it is composed of the sources P and J. First P refers to God as Elohim, whereas J refers to him as Yahweh. Second, there are contradictions between the two sources: J has it rain 40 days and P 150 days; J has Noah bring in pairs of unclean animals and 7 pairs of clean animals, but P has pairs of all animals. Third, there is much repetition within the flood story, which suggests that at least two sources have been combined.

**Argument from Divine Names**

The oscillation between Elohim and Yahweh has been regarded by traditional source critics as initially the most decisive reason for distinguishing J and P in the flood story. Gunkel said: "One starts with the surest symptom of source division, namely the divine names, and thereby determines the source of individual passages and their interconnection." Emerton apparently shares Gunkel's confidence in the value of this criterion for he criticizes Cassuto's attempt to explain the alternation of Yahweh and Elohim theologically. M. D. Cassuto argued that Elohim is used to show that the God of the flood is creator and lord of the whole world; this makes Elohim the more appropriate term to use in the flood story. However, Yahweh is used on those occasions where divine righteousness (vi 5-8), sacrifice (vii 1, 5, viii 20-1), or his special relationship with Noah is emphasized (vii 16). Emerton thinks the

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3 *Genesis* (Göttingen, 1910), p. 137.