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THE ORIGIN OF SELECTED  
IDEAS AND PRACTICES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

### A. The Subject Stated

Many students of Hebrew history have in the past questioned the historicity of the events and persons recorded in the Book of Genesis.<sup>1</sup> The theory that controlled their thinking was that Mosaic religion was so primitive in itself that there could not have been anything distinctly Hebrew before it other than vague beliefs and practices common to most of the people of that time.<sup>2</sup> Histories of the Hebrew religion written from this viewpoint simply began with the Mosaic period and eliminated the patriarchal period.

Since 1928, when C. L. Woolley discovered that Ur of the Chaldees had a comparatively high degree of culture, the whole matter of the historicity of the patriarchal period of the Book of Genesis has been reopened. The fact that the Chaldeans of Abraham's time could write, were superior to the Egyptians in many of their crafts, and had several well-developed religious cults demonstrated the possibility of a pre-Mosaic period of Hebrew history such as is recorded in the Book of Genesis.<sup>3</sup> Such a possibility has been further enhanced by the actual discovery of the names Abram, Terah,

- 
1. Oesterley and Robinson, Hebrew Religion.
  2. Caiger, Bible and Spade, pp. 37-39.
  3. Ibid., p. 30.



and Joseph upon contract tablets in the Chaldean ruins.<sup>1</sup> Under such evidence it must be admitted that the view holding the patriarchs to be mythological figures of Hebrew history must be questioned.

With the possibility of such a patriarchal period actually existing the questions that arise are: (1) what was the nature of the religion of the patriarchs; and (2) from where did the ideas and practices known to the patriarchs come? The latter of the two questions is the major concern of this thesis. It is the purpose of this thesis to discover the possible explanations of the origin of certain ideas and practices in patriarchal life and to suggest which explanation is most plausible.

#### B. The Subject Delimited

As the title suggests, this thesis is an inquiry into the origin of some selected ideas and practices in the Book of Genesis. Three things have guided the selection of the particular ideas and practices chosen: (1) whether or not the idea or practice is present in the patriarchal period of Hebrew history; (2) whether or not the idea or practice had an apparent parallel in non-Hebraic religions; and (3) the relative importance of the particular idea or practice. It

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1. Caiger, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

is obvious that this selection omits from the immediate scope of the study many ideas and practices mentioned in the Book of Genesis. However, it is hoped that whatever conclusions are arrived at will to a large degree be applicable to those ideas and practices not treated.

Because the scope of this study is limited to the immediate life of the patriarchs only such references to "development" or "ultimate origin" that are necessary for the clarification of the main purpose of the study will be made.

### C. The Subject Justified

There are few periods in Hebrew-Christian history which more adequately demonstrate the controversy between naturalism and supernaturalism than the patriarchal period. Whatever interpretation is given to the religion of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph will eventually affect the whole gamut of the Hebrew-Christian tradition. Therefore, it becomes important to know the origin of patriarchal ideas and practices with as much exactitude as possible.

Though there are many studies which deal with this subject and arrive at approximately the same conclusions, yet it is felt that a new contribution can be made. As the younger sciences of archaeology and anthropology grow older, new light invariably is shed upon old questions. An illustration of this is the completely new contribution of modern

anthropology to the subject of "original religion." At one time anthropology was so meager and its findings so crudely interpreted that it testified to a completely different conclusion from that to which it now testifies concerning original religion. With the abundance of an ever-growing knowledge of the facts of antiquity a re-checking of former conclusions, which in some cases were made with scanty knowledge, may be quite profitable. Of particular value is the investigation which is limited to objective conclusions.

#### D. Method of Procedure

The procedure involved is relatively simple and the logic easy to follow. In Chapter I various ideas and practices are selected and grouped according to subject, and possible explanations with regard to their origin are given. Chapter II involves the establishment of criteria in order to determine which of the explanations suggested in Chapter I is most in keeping with the facts. Chapter III is concerned with the application of the criteria arrived at in Chapter II to the ideas and practices surveyed in Chapter I, in order to ascertain the most plausible explanations of their origin. The summary is a re-statement of the procedure and conclusions of the preceding chapters.

## E. The Sources

The sources of data are varied. Of primary importance is the text of Genesis. As the only historical document dealing particularly with the ideas and practices of the patriarchs, it forms a starting and checking point. Archaeological studies of the Ancient Near East provide materials for checking the record of Genesis and a commentary upon the cultures of those peoples most closely associated with the early Hebrews. Studies in cultural anthropology and comparative religion in relation to the Semitic and neighboring peoples provide a fairly objective interpretation of their cultures. To these source materials are added commentaries, introductions, and encyclopedia articles bearing on the subject matter of the Book of Genesis, giving valuable summaries and particular interpretations. Finally, there are a number of books already written which deal directly with one or more aspects of the subject.

CHAPTER I

A SURVEY OF SELECTED  
IDEAS AND PRACTICES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS  
TOGETHER WITH POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR THEIR ORIGIN

## CHAPTER I

### A SURVEY OF SELECTED IDEAS AND PRACTICES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS TOGETHER WITH POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR THEIR ORIGIN

#### A. Introduction

A fundamental procedure in dealing with complex materials is the grouping of those things which belong together. The key to the understanding of any religion, whether it be primitive or civilized, is analysis, which depends directly upon systematic separation and grouping of elements. The religion of any given period or of any people should be separated into its component parts so that elements, trends, and emphases may be noted. Until this procedure was applied to Israel's early religion, only partial understanding of it was possible. This general principle of grouping, as observed by Oesterley, Robinson, and Frazer, seems to be the necessary first step in deducing anything about the religion of the patriarchs.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore the purpose of this chapter to present a synthesis or over-all picture of a few of the ideas and practices known to the patriarchs, and to suggest possible explanations as to their origins. This is

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1. Oesterley, W. O. E., and Robinson, Theo. H., Hebrew Religion, pp. 3-127.  
Frazer, James George, Folklore in the Old Testament, pp. 1-439.

accomplished first by the choice of particular ideas or practices known to have existed among the patriarchs, and stating with references all that is mentioned concerning them in the patriarchal portion of the Book of Genesis. Following the survey of numerous ideas and practices three possible explanations are given, each with a brief history showing the reasons for its rise.

## B. A Survey of the Selected Ideas and Practices

### 1. The Use of Animal Sacrifice in Worship and Covenant Making

Only three animal sacrifices recorded in Genesis fall within the confines of the patriarchal period. However, the recording of only three animal sacrifices out of a long span of some two hundred years should not be taken to mean that the practice was not prevalent. The fact that animal sacrifice is mentioned in connection with Abel and Noah before the patriarchal period, and in connection with the Mosaic law after the patriarchal period would seem to indicate that it was more or less a continuous practice.

The references to it in patriarchal times involve only Abraham and Jacob. The first instance is when Abraham sought some assurance from God relative to the covenant, 15:9-18. On this occasion Abraham took a heifer, a she-goat, a ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon, and slew them according to God's command. In obedience Abraham divided the

carcasses in twain, and arranged them in a certain order. Later, while Abraham was in a deep sleep, he witnessed a burning furnace pass between the divided parts of the slain animals. Abraham took this as an assurance that the covenant was established.

The second recorded animal sacrifice of the patriarchal period is in 22:13-14. The occasion was the offering of Isaac, which was never consummated because a ram, which was taken from the thicket near by, was offered in his place.

The third instance of sacrifice in the patriarchal period is when Jacob and Laban met and covenanted in order that neither would harm the other, 31:54. The unusual feature of this sacrificial event was that a feast accompanied it.

All three sacrifices are referred to as burnt offerings. The first involved the covenant between God and man, the second involved devotion between man and God, and the third a covenant between man and man. The first two seem indispensable to the fulfillment of Abraham's religious observances. They are mentioned in connection with two of the most important points of relationship between Abraham and his God: (1) when God promised Abraham something, and (2) when Abraham proved himself to God.



## 2. The Use of Human Sacrifice in Satisfying the Supernatural

There is only one mention of this principle in the patriarchal period, 22:1-19. The occasion was the offering of Isaac by Abraham. It was done in obedience to the Divine command, and it involved approximately the same procedure used in the sacrifice of animals. The fact that the incident progressed to a point short of actual human sacrifice does not alter the fact that what Abraham had in mind was the actual sacrifice of his own son.

It should also be noted that the incident in total may have involved the principle of substitution. It may be reasoned that Abraham simply accepted the presence of the ram caught in the thicket as an indication that God had become satisfied with his obedience, and therefore had provided a ram for the sacrifice. However, it is altogether possible that Abraham conceived of the slaying of the ram instead of the slaying of his son as involving the substitutionary principle.

## 3. The Use of Scarification or Other Physical Mutilations in Covenant Making

One of the classical examples of physical mutilations used in religion is circumcision. According to the Biblical records, as far as the Hebrews were concerned, it originated with Abraham, 17:9-27. After receiving the command from God he circumcised the males of his household for a sign of the

covenant. From that time forward the male children of the Hebrew families were circumcised shortly after birth, as was Isaac, 21:4.

Circumcision is again referred to in the Jacob narratives. The incident does not directly involve Jacob, but it does involve his household. On that occasion the non-Hebrew Shechem desired to wed Dinah, a Hebrew maiden. The sons of Jacob at first refused, but later consented with the condition that Shechem, Hamor, and all the males of the household be circumcised. The house of Shechem and Hamor agreed to this. Three days later while Shechem, Hamor and their household were recovering from the operation, the sons of Jacob slew them, 34:1-31.

The rite of circumcision, according to the patriarchal narratives, appears to be one of the most obvious points of difference between the Hebrews and the surrounding peoples. It was administered only to the children of the covenant, and was jealously protected even to the point of unethical behavior.

Rarely associated with circumcision is the lameness of Jacob's thigh, 32:25-31. Though circumcision was an act of man, and the lameness of Jacob an act of the supernatural, yet a parallel existed because: (1) both involved the altering of physical appearance; (2) both were closely related to blessing from God; and (3) both Abraham's command from God

to circumcise and Jacob's experience of lameness involved the changing of their names.

#### 4. The Belief in Dreams, Visions, Theophany, and Appearances of Deity as Methods of Supernatural Revelation

The phenomenon of revelation is not lacking in the patriarchal period. Altogether there are fourteen references to dreams, visions, theophanies and appearances as methods of revelation. One is a vision, three are theophanies, five are appearances, and five are dreams.

The revelation by vision came to Abraham from God for the purpose of confirming the covenant promise, 15:1. During this vision a conversation between Abraham and God transpired.

The three theophanies present some difficulties. The first includes the visitation of three strangers to Abraham's tent, 18:2-22. The conversation of one of these strangers bears the mark of the supernatural. He seemed to have known the fact that the promise of a son had been given to Abraham. Not only did he know of the promise, but he also knew when the son would be born. Because of these peculiarities the strangers traditionally have been looked upon as being some type of a theophany. The second such instance recorded in the patriarchal period has to do with Lot, 19:1-21. Just previous to the destruction of Sodom, two messengers came to Lot's home for the express purpose of warning him of the impending doom of the city. When Lot hesitated to obey their

advice to leave Sodom, they led Lot and his family out of the city. The foreknowledge of the city's destruction and the authority evidenced in insisting that Lot and his family leave the city have been taken as indications of the fact that these messengers were actually theophanies of some supernatural beings. The third recorded instance of a theophany involves Jacob, 32:24-32. On this occasion Jacob was somewhat fearfully anticipating a visit with Esau. While alone he wrestled with a man until morning. The record conveys the idea that Jacob had an unusual spiritual experience as a result of wrestling with the man. The fact that the man was able to impart a new sense of Jacob's spiritual obligations and a blessing has been taken to mean that the man Jacob wrestled was some form of material manifestation of a supernatural being.

The first appearance involved God appearing to Abraham when Abraham first came to Canaan, 12:7. God at that time announced that He would give him the land he was standing upon. The second occurred when God appeared to Abraham upon his arrival at Mamre, 18:1, the third when God visited Sarah in connection with Isaac's birth, 21:1, and the fourth when it is said of Jacob that God appeared to him at Bethel, 25:1.

The six dreams involved one by Jacob, when he saw the heavenly ladder, 28:11,12, two by Joseph, indicating to him his superiority over his brothers, 37:5,9, and three by non-

Israelites: Pharaoh's chief butler, Pharaoh's chief baker, and one by Pharaoh himself. In the case of the last three it was necessary for Joseph, an Israelite, to interpret them.

#### 5. The Tithe

The tithe is mentioned only twice in the patriarchal narratives. When Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek, king of Salem, 14:20, and when Jacob had the unusual experience with God at Bethel and was prompted to give a tenth of what he had to God, 28:10-22. In both cases the tithe seems to have involved one tenth of everything possessed.

#### 6. The Use of Material Objects in Worship, Devotion, and in Commemoration of Important Religious Experiences or Unusual Events.

As in the case of dreams, visions, and theophanies, there is an abundance of reference to the use of material objects in the religious practice of the patriarchs.

There are five references made that indicate a close relationship between trees or shrubs and religion. The first instance of trees in the religious experience of the patriarchs occurs as Abraham enters the land of Canaan for the first time, and rests at the terebinth or turpentine tree in Moreh, where God appeared to him, 13:18. The second instance involved a terebinth tree which stood a little way from Abraham's tent at Mamre, 18:1. God also appeared to Abraham at this tree. The third reference made is to a tamarish, a shrub which is well known in Palestine. On this occasion

Abraham planted the tamarish, and there called upon the name of God, 21:33. The last reference concerns Jacob. Upon discovering that Rachel had various idols with her, he took them and buried them under a terebinth tree, 35:4.

References to altars are five: when Abraham came back to Canaan from Egypt to an altar, 13:4; which he had previously made, 12:8; when Abraham moved to Mamre and built an altar, 13:18; when Jacob settled in Shechem and erected an altar, 33:20; and when Jacob was commanded to go back to Bethel and make an altar, 35:1-3.

There are four instances referring to the use of stones and pillars: when Jacob dreamed his revelatory dream his head was upon a stone, 28:11; when Jacob made the covenant with Laban and used a heap of stones as a witness, 31:45; when Jacob came back to Bethel and made a pillar of stone, 35:14; and when Jacob buried his wife Rachel and placed a pillar of stone upon her grave, 35:20.

There is only one reference to teraphim (house-hold idols), 31:19, 30-35. In this instance Rachel had stolen them from her father Laban when she left home with Jacob. From what is recorded in 35:4, it is possible that Jacob included them in the burial of foreign idols and rings under the terebinth tree near by Shechem.

## 6. The Practice of Polygyny

The marital relationships of the patriarchs were quite complex. Abraham had three wives; Hagar, 16:3, Sarah, 16:1, and Keturah, 25:6. He also had concubines, 25:6, as did his brother, Nahor, 20:20-24. Jacob had two wives: Leah and Rachel, 29:26-30; and also had relations with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, 30:3, and with Zilpah, Leah's handmaid, 30:9. Esau had three wives; Adah, Ahohbambh, and Basemath, 36:2,3. Er, the grandson of Jacob, died, and left his wife, Tamar, to his brother, Onan, 38:8. Judah, Er's father, through the sin and deceit of Tamar, later bore a son by Tamar, 38:15-30. Other instances of irregularities in marital relationships occurred when Abraham allowed Pharaoh, 12:16, and Abimelech to take his wife, whom he passed as his sister, 20:2.

### C. Possible Explanations of the Origins of the Selected Ideas and Practices Surveyed

#### 1. The Problem Stated

Until the advent of the historical criticism of the Bible, traditional orthodoxy found little difficulty explaining the origin of the ideas and practices in early Hebrew religious life. Whatever could not be readily explained was attributed to God. So little was known of Israel's contemporaries that there was no basis for an assertion to the contrary. Historical criticism succeeded in disrupting the field

of Biblical interpretation sufficiently to produce at least three major opinions regarding patriarchal ideas and practices. It is the purpose of this section to present representative explanations for the origin of the ideas and practices surveyed as given by the three major schools of thought, "isolated supernaturalism", "evolutionary naturalism," and the third, which for the want of a better name, shall be called the "religio-historical" school.

## 2. Isolated Supernaturalistic Explanations

### a. Its Description

By "isolated supernaturalism" is meant that approach to Israel's history which ascribes all or almost all of the religious and cultural phenomena of Israel to God. As applied particularly to the subject of this thesis, it represents that school of thought which greatly minimizes the natural elements in favor of the supernatural elements in explaining the origin of ideas and practices present in the patriarchal period of Israel's history.

Isolated supernaturalism conceives of the religious experience of the patriarchs as something quite independent of the rest of history. The ideas and practices are thought of as having come directly from God and are therefore almost completely disregarded as questions for further study. Under this approach it is held that sacrifices, tithes, dreams, visions, theophanies, circumcision, and incorporation of



material objects in the worship of the patriarchs are to be accounted for through God's initiative. This position provides a strong buttress for a supernatural apologetic. It wards off tampering with the Old Testament documents, and waves aside most critical questions of historical background.

b. Its Rise

Out of many reasons for the rise of the isolated supernaturalistic approach to Hebrew religion, three seem most important. The first is the lack of historical knowledge, which was caused mainly by a comparatively small development in the field of archaeology. Albright aptly points out the place of archaeology in enlarging the historical horizon.<sup>1</sup> Without the contributions of archeology there was no way in existence of penetrating the secrets of the ancient world, and little could be said of the mind of ancient man.<sup>2</sup> Because of a scarcity of information about Israel's contemporaries, there was not the slightest indication to believe that Israel's religion, as recorded in the Bible, was affected any more than in a secondary fashion by the surrounding peoples. The conclusion that God was the initiator of most, if not all the aspects of Hebrew religion, was therefore quite acceptable. The second reason is the reaction toward extreme naturalism.

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1. Albright, W. F., *From Stone Age to Christianity*, pp. 1-87.  
2. Albright, W. F., *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 3.

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a strange reaction to the liberalizing of theology. The reaction was hostile and forcefully made in the endeavor to check the naturalistic tendencies in seminaries and churches. New Seminaries were begun by some. Others began to educate the laity through the use of Bible Institutes, summer conferences and popular Bible study books. On the whole, historical criticism was condemned, and a large part of Christendom became entrenched more than ever in a strong supernaturalism. The third reason is that the nature of man demands some supernatural reference. Human beings are universally conscious of the supernatural.<sup>1</sup> Though it is true that civilized man has succeeded in ridding himself of the sense of the supernatural to some degree, yet this may be taken as an exception and not the rule. Modern science agrees that man is essentially religious.<sup>2</sup> As a religious creature, man has a propensity toward the supernatural. In times of crisis and stress it is not unusual to see this tendency accentuated.

### 3. Evolutionary Naturalistic Explanation

#### a. Its Description

"Evolutionary naturalism" in relation to Hebrew religion is that approach to Israel's religion which ascribes all or almost all of the religious and cultural phenomena of

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1. LeRoy, *The Religion of the Primitive*, pp. 3,4.  
2. Zwemer, *The Origin of Religion*, p. 24.

Israel to a gradual development from the inferior to the superior by a natural process. William Schmidt describes it as follows:

"A doctrine with the following methodological principles: Development proceeds on the whole always from the bottom upward, from the lower to the higher, from the more simple to the more complex, from the poorer to the richer - consequently the first of these two members is always the older, the second the younger."<sup>1</sup>

As applied particularly to the subject of this thesis, it represents that school of thought which minimizes the supernatural element in favor of evolutionary and naturalistic elements in explaining the origin of ideas and practices present in the patriarchal period of Israel's history.

#### b. Its Rise

Though a type of evolutionary naturalism was in existence among the Greeks, yet evolutionary naturalism is a phenomenon without precedence in history. The Greeks conceived a cycle of development but never linear development.<sup>2</sup> With the accelerated development of the natural sciences during the first half of the nineteenth century came the linear concept of change and inevitable progress of the universe and all within it. This fact is well illustrated by the rejection of John Lamark's treatise on evolution in 1809, and the acceptance of Darwin's

- 
1. Schmidt, *The Culture-Historical Method of Ethnology*, p. 10.
  2. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, p. 32.

in 1859. The intervening years witnessed great strides in the development of the natural sciences which took the edge off traditional supernaturalism and prepared the educated for a thoroughgoing evolutionism. Shortly after Darwin's monumental work was published, the Biblical critics began the application of biological and psychological evolution to religion. In 1866 the Graf and Welhausen evolutionary interpretation of Hebrew religion was made popular. Since that time evolutionary naturalism has dominated practically all investigations into the history of Hebrew religion.<sup>1</sup>

There seem to be two basic reasons underlying the rise of evolutionary naturalism in the field of Hebrew religion. The first of these reasons is that civilized man had entered into an extremely mechanistic era. When the natural sciences began to discover the working of the human body, the regularity of nature, and the laws of cause and effect, much of that which was once mystery became known. A general optimism arose which seems always to accompany evolutionary science and philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The prevailing notion seemed to be that man, given time, could answer the problems of existence, origin, and present difficulty. Though supernaturalism was not rejected immediately, it did eventually become an antiquated philosophy to many. The second reason is that some supporters of the

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1. Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament*, pp. 55,56.

2. Henry, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

supernaturalistic viewpoint refused to integrate modern discovery with their traditional faith. The result was that the gap between supernaturalism and evolutionary naturalism became more and more pronounced until the evolutionary naturalistic approach to Hebrew religion became well defined.

The effect evolutionary naturalism had upon religion was tremendous. From its initial start in Germany, where many British students such as Driver, W. R. Smith, Oesterley, Robinson and others studied, it spread to England and through the medium of a common language to the United States.<sup>1</sup> The evolutionary method became the standard approach to all matters of history and religion. Israel's history was divided into various stages. The Biblical documents were rearranged to fit the evolutionary approach to Israel's religion. The patriarchal period was made to represent a very low level of development akin to animism, which E. B. Tylor determined was the starting point of all religion.<sup>2</sup> Others like Oesterley and Robinson calculated that all religion must pass through three stages before becoming monotheistic: (1) animatism or pre-animism, (2) animism, and (3) polytheism. They conceived that the religion of the patriarchs still had elements of each of these in company with other elements of totemism, taboos, and ancestor-worship, which had been developed along

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1. Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

2. Schmidt, *Origin and Growth of Religion*, p. 11.

the way.<sup>1</sup> Though men like Spencer, Robertson, Smith, Sydney, Hartland, Grazer, Haddon and Marett differed slightly as to the beginnings of religion, yet they were in essential agreement over the fact of evolution in religion.<sup>2</sup> Under the influence of these men evolutionary naturalism became intellectually respectable. They successfully reduced the origins of Hebrew religion to the severist type of naturalism.

#### 4. The Religio-Historical Explanation

##### a. Its Description

As the name implies, the religio-historical explanation of origin in Hebrew religion takes into consideration the religious or supernatural element, and the historical or natural element. It affirms that both these elements entered into producing the ideas and practices in Hebrew religion, and seeks to find how and to what degree these elements enter into its making.

##### b. Its Rise

It is admitted that the term religio-historical is coined for the purpose of this thesis, and therefore no actual group has existed which was called by that name. However, it is also true that though no group of persons has been associated with the name "religio-historical," yet there is ample

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1. Oesterley and Robinson, Hebrew Religion, pp. 14,18-61.

2. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 71.

CHAPTER II

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING  
WHICH EXPLANATION IS MOST PLAUSIBLE

## CHAPTER II

### CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING WHICH EXPLANATION IS MOST PLAUSIBLE

#### A. Introduction

Primary to all true judgment is the acquisition of valid criteria upon which an intelligent judgment may rest. The purpose of this chapter is to set forth just such criteria.

In one way or another each of the criteria mentioned has been used in the past to deduce certain conclusions concerning the religion of the patriarchs. However, it cannot be said that they have been set forth independent of each other in such a way as to enable the student to think in terms of the application of each.

The criteria referred to are intended to be wholly neutral and objective. In some instances one or more of the criteria mentioned has been used in one or another of the explanations discussed in Chapter I. However, the grouping of all criteria together and the equal validity of each is admittedly a new thing.

The treatment of each is the same. First the criterion is briefly discussed and stated, and then the relevance of the criterion to the problem of the origin of the ideas and practices in question is clarified.



evidence that many scholarly individuals have embraced its basic precepts. Scholars such as Sayce and Orr in England, and Hommel, Dahse Troelstra and others on the continent have been ardent supporters of supernaturalism without neglecting the natural processes of history. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia represents an example of an effort toward the intergrating of supernaturalism with the latest findings of archaeology, history, anthropology and other sciences.<sup>1</sup>

The movement arose as knowledge from the past revealed that Israel's history had not occurred in a vacuum. Striking parallels between early Hebrew religion and contemporaneous religions of other peoples appeared. At one point or another almost every idea or practice could be related to a parallel idea or practice in the religion of the surrounding peoples. Many scholars who chose not to abandon supernaturalism nor reasonable naturalism came to grips with the problem, and have sought to give an explanation for origins in Hebrew religion that would do justice to the demands of religion and history.

#### D. Summary

It has been the purpose of this chapter to set forth the selected ideas and practices with which this study is

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1. Orr, (editor), The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. Vlll.

concerned. The ideas and practices surveyed are the following: (1) the use of animal sacrifice in worship and covenant making, (2) the use of human sacrifice in satisfying the supernatural, (3) the use of scarification or other physical mutilations in covenant making, (4) the belief in dreams, visions, theophanies and appearances of Deity as methods of supernatural revelation, (5) the tithe, (6) the use of material objects in worship, devotion, and in commemoration of important religious experiences or unusual events, and (7) the practice of polygyny.

It has further been the purpose of this chapter to describe and give a brief history of three possible explanations for the origin of the ideas and practices surveyed. The explanations set forth are: (1) isolated supernaturalism, which arose because of a scarcity of actual materials of the past, the abuses of naturalism, and the natural tendency of man to reflect upon the supernatural; (2) evolutionary naturalism, which arose because of scientific knowledge revealing heretofore unknown processes of nature, and the abuses of certain types of supernaturalism; and finally (3) the religio-historical explanation, which arose because of the logical demands of both a supernatural religion and natural history.

## B. Criterion of Literary Form

### 1. The Criterion Stated

The purpose of literary production is to transmit thought. If there is a failure in this ultimate end either the production is poor, or the reader is at fault. If the literature in question is great literature, the fault then lies with the reader. Arnold, using poetry as an example, states it thus:

The works of great poets require to be approached at the outset with full faith in their excellence: the reader must be convinced that if he does not fully admire them, it is his fault and not theirs.<sup>1</sup>

The highest service that can be rendered to any great literary production is the lending of one's self to that production in order that it might fully say what it was intended to say. Only after this necessary step is taken should criticism follow.

The Bible as a literary production demands the same honor that any other literary production receives, yet in many cases its introductory hearing is one shrouded in question, doubt, and contempt. Curry states it this way:

In our endeavour to study the Bible for its more adequate interpretation, are we not apt to begin at the wrong end? Theories, speculations, theological views, are not a good introduction.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Arnold, *Introductory Lectures on Modern History*, p. 51.
  2. Curry, *Vocal and Literary Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 43.

Another author commenting specifically on the Abraham narratives says:

Many of the lessons from Abraham do not depend on the question whether the story is fact or fiction. It might be a mistake for you to exhaust your energies in trying to settle this question. It may be wiser to leave the question open and begin mastering the contents of the narrative as it stands. By this procedure you will accomplish two things. You will get for yourself the lessons taught...and you will make the best possible preparation for settling any questions that arise as to its character.<sup>1</sup>

This is all by way of saying that the author be given a chance to express himself in his intended way. His intended way involves the mechanics of composition used by him in the document. The reader's observation of contextual use, development of narrative, psychological implications, and final results all contribute to give a sense of unity, coherence, and purpose which reflect the intention of the author, and are basic for proper understanding of the narrative.

Recorded historical accounts, when read in the foregoing manner, will not be misinterpreted as readily as when superficially read. The deeper knowledge gained through such a respect and appreciation for the narrative will prevent hasty and inaccurate judgments.

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1. Beecher, Reasonable Biblical Criticism, p. 117.

## 2. Relevance of the Criterion of Literary Form to the Origin of the Ideas and Practices in Question

This criterion is of particular importance to the study of any of the patriarchal narratives. These narratives suffer most at the hands of those who do precisely the opposite. If this principle is observed in the reading of the patriarchal narratives, they will appear as they were intended to appear. Each idea and practice will be seen in its proper setting accomplishing its particular purpose. It will claim neither more nor less than the author intended. The discovery of the relation an idea or practice has to the whole narrative, what is actually said about it, and how it is said all bear vitally on the purpose and significance of it, and will therefore give information valuable to the question of origin.

### C. Criterion of Historical Method

#### 1. The Criterion Stated

Questions of an historical nature must be approached in a manner that will not violate the principles of historical science. Since the problem of the origin of ideas and practices in the patriarch era of Israel's history is an historical problem, these ideas and practices shall be examined by the historical method and no other.

The historical method may be defined as follows:

That science, which besides corresponding theoretical explanations, offers us a systematic, scientifically founded sum of directions to examine historical facts as to the scope of their testimony, their value, and inner associations.<sup>1</sup>

It differs from other methods of approaching situations in the past by limiting itself only to the facts. Feder states it thus:

The peculiarity of the historical method follows from the special character of historical science which in turn derives its special character from historical knowledge. Now the material objects of historical knowledge are single facts and not general concepts.<sup>2</sup>

In summary form it could be said that the historical method of approaching instances in the past involves: (1) the gathering of all possible facts pertaining to any particular historical incident, (2) the dealing with these facts on an individual basis, and (3) the elimination of all general concepts from the area rightly belonging to specific fact.

## 2. Relevance of the Criterion of Historical Method to the Origin of the Ideas and Practices in Question

The historical investigations of the Scriptures have been so intimately bound to philosophical interpretations of history and religion that the testimony of factual data has often been minimized, reinterpreted, or lost altogether.

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1. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 15.

2. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 18.

It is at once obvious that no scientific conclusions as to the origin of ideas and practices of the patriarchal period can be reached under such a procedure. The factual data concerning any particular ideas and practices in question must be dealt with independently. This eliminates the error to which Schmidt refers:

Often data are thrown together without investigating whether they belong to the same time, place, and stage of culture; in short the simplest principles of source criticism do not seem to exist....whereas they are nowhere more necessary.<sup>1</sup>

If this error can be eliminated from the investigation of patriarchal religion, much will be accomplished in discovering the real source of the ideas and practices in question.

#### D. Criterion of Diffusion

##### 1. The Criterion Stated

It is a proven fact that cultures develop primarily as a result of the diffusion of ideas and practices. A. L. Kroeber, a famous anthropologist, in commenting upon this question says:

....imitation is the normal process by which men live, and invention is rare, a thing which societies and individuals oppose with more resistance than they are aware of....<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 19.

2. Kroeber, Anthropology, p. 239.

R. H. Lowie, another famous anthropologist, says this about the principle of borrowing in culture development: "Cultures develop mainly through borrowing due to chance contacts."<sup>1</sup> Whether called imitation, borrowing, or diffusion, the same thing is meant. All involve the disseminating of an idea or practice from one culture to another.

2. Relevance of the Criterion of Diffusion to the Origin of the Ideas and Practices in Question

Maps and charts of the world have been made which are both elaborate and accurate, showing the pathway of diffusion of certain stories, customs, practices, and languages.<sup>2</sup> At no geographical location in the world has there been more positive contact of cultures than the Near East.<sup>3</sup> In the light of the evidence of the anthropologist, sociologist, and the Biblical record itself, it must be recognized that patriarchal culture was affected by this principle as well as all other cultures. However, it must also be stated that the direction of diffusion is as important as the fact of diffusion. Dr. Schmidt points out the necessity of recognizing the principle of diffusion, but also states that it is fallacious to believe that diffusion occurs only in one direction.<sup>4</sup> When two cultures contact each other elements

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1. Lowie, Primitive Society, p. 441.
  2. Kroeber, op. cit., p. 20, p. 284.
  3. Ibid., pp. 453-456.
  4. Schmidt, Primitive Revelation, pp. 225-227.



of both are absorbed by both. One culture may be stronger and more virile than the other, but case upon case reveals that borrowing is in both directions.

The application of this criterion to the ideas and practices selected out of the patriarchal period of Israel's history will give a far truer picture of the origin of the ideas and practices in question.

#### E. The Criterion of Essence

##### 1. The Criterion Stated

The dictionary states that "essence" is that which is the real character of a thing, or the indispensable quality of anything.<sup>1</sup> By definition it follows that if the essence of a particular thing is removed, then that thing either ceases to exist or becomes something else. It follows also that if the real character of a thing is its essence, then the most vital part of a thing cannot be known unless the essence is discovered.

These observations are no less true of the religion of the patriarchs than of anything else. If the religion of the patriarchs is to be known fully, then the essence of that religion must be determined.

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1. The New Winston Dictionary.

## 2. Relevance to the Problem of the Origin of Ideas and Practices in Question

If the above conclusions concerning the essence of patriarchal religion are correct, it is then quite logical to seek for evidences of the presence of this essence in the ideas and practices in question. If it can be demonstrated that a particular idea or practice has, at its root, a concept of one God, who is moral, personal, and universal, then it can be shown also that at least in this respect it did not originate in surrounding cultures, because if there was anything the religion of the ancient Near East lacked it was such a concept of God.

### F. Criterion of the Religion of the Primitives

#### 1. The Criterion Stated

W. R. Smith and others were stimulated to a reinterpretation of Hebrew religion by the investigations into the religion of contemporary primitive peoples. Their attitude might be summed up in a few statements made by LeRoy concerning those who seek an explanation of religious phenomena among primitives. "Do you wish the explanation of religions, of their teaching, of their rites, of their precepts? Go back to their origin."<sup>1</sup>

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1. LeRoy, Religion of the Primitives, p. 282.

Then in answer to the question, "How do we find their origin?", LeRoy quotes this school of thought as saying that the best source to explain religion is:

..the present savage populations who have halted at a lower stage of social religious evolution; who very nearly represent what all humanity primitively has once been.<sup>1</sup>

LeRoy points out that these scholars recognize that their conclusions arise from the study of primitive religion and quotes them as saying so. "These conclusions, which sum up the history of religions, you will arrive at by the study of the primitives. Go to the primitives."<sup>2</sup>

Frazer's studies, which are very typical of this position, contributed much to the understanding of some aspects of Hebrew religion. Some of the clear analyses of Hebrew religion by Oesterley and Robinson would not have been possible had they not used this approach. Though it is recognized that there are dangers in such an approach, yet its merits require that it be included as a criterion for assisting in determining the origin of the ideas and practices in question.

## 2. Relevance of the Religion of the Primitives to the Origin of the Ideas and Practices in Question.

If a resemblance exists between a given idea or practice known to the patriarchs and an idea or practice known to

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1. Ibid., p. 283.  
2. Loc. cit.

their pagan contemporaries, it may be possible through the analysis of the idea or practice in both cultures, in the light of what is known of that idea and practice among present day primitives, to establish a full parallel or demonstrate vital differences. This procedure will contribute much to the quest for origins.

#### G. Summary

It has been the purpose of this chapter to set forth satisfactory criteria with which to determine which explanation, of the three mentioned in Chapter I, is the most plausible explanation of the ideas and practices surveyed in that same chapter.

The criteria consists of five points, each of which is briefly described and related to the problem of the thesis. The five criteria are: (1) that of literary form, which, when applied, will determine the author's purpose for writing the narratives as they are; (2) that of historical method, which will provide an objective, non-philosophical approach to the ideas and practices in question; (3) that of diffusion, which will show the relation of elements in patriarchal culture to surrounding cultures; (4) that of essence, which will show the innermost quality of the ideas and practices in question; and (5) that of

the religion of the primitives, which will clarify the total significance of the ideas and practices in question.

CHAPTER III

APPLICATION OF THE CRITERIA TO THE IDEAS AND PRACTICES  
SURVEYED IN CHAPTER I TOGETHER WITH THE MOST  
PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THEIR ORIGIN

## CHAPTER III

### APPLICATION OF THE CRITERIA TO THE IDEAS AND PRACTICES SURVEYED IN CHAPTER I TOGETHER WITH THE MOST PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THEIR ORIGIN

#### A. Introduction

It shall be the purpose of this chapter to bring together the ideas and practices surveyed in chapter I and the criteria of chapter II in order that the most plausible of three explanations for the origin of the ideas and practices mentioned in chapter I may be singled out.

The procedure shall involve the dividing of this chapter into two major divisions. In the first part the criteria will be applied to the particular ideas and practices in question. In the second division there will be an attempt to determine which over-all explanation of the origins is most in keeping with the facts in view of the findings in the first part of the chapter.

In the division on application of the criteria to the particular ideas and practices, only those criteria which are significant for a certain idea or practice will be applied to that idea or practice. A concluding suggestion as to origin, in the light of the facts discussed, will be given in connection with every idea and practice mentioned. These conclusions will enter into the choice of the most plausible

explanation in the next division.

The most plausible explanation is chosen on the basis of which explanation best meets the over-all results of the application of the criteria to the ideas and practices in question.

#### B. Application of Criteria to the Specific Ideas and Practices in Question

##### 1. The Use of Animal Sacrifice in Worship and Covenant Making

###### a. Application of the Criterion of Historical Method

According to some commentators, every mention of an altar implies animal sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> If this is true, then the practice of animal sacrifice was very prevalent in patriarchal times. However, since only three animal sacrifices are actually mentioned, discussion shall be limited to these three.

Abraham's slaying of animals in chapter 15 and Jacob's slaying of an animal in chapter 32 are similar in that both are covenant-making sacrifices. The third instance of sacrifice is when Abraham slew a ram for a burnt offering. This was for a purpose which ultimately involved devotion.

With reference to animal sacrifice in covenant making, it can be stated that the custom was quite universal.<sup>2</sup> Basically the practice may be described thus:

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1. Reeves, "Old Testament Sacrifice," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, p. 2642.
  2. Frazer, Folklore of the Old Testament, pp. 154-176.  
Trumbull, The Blood Covenant, pp. 43-58.



....a form of mutual covenanting, by which two persons enter into the closest, the most enduring and the most sacred of compacts, as friends and brothers, or as more than brothers, through inter-comingling of their blood by means of mutual tasting, or its inter-transfusion.<sup>1</sup>

What was usually involved was the cutting of the arm of each of the parties seeking covenant relationship, and either mixing, drinking, or sucking each other's blood. The contract thus established was life long. It may well be, as Driver suggests, that the unfaithful party, as punishment, would be slain in similar fashion to the slain animals of the covenant.<sup>2</sup>

It is admitted that there seems to be a wide step between inter-comingling of the blood of the two parties seeking covenant relationship and the slaying of animals. However, Trumbull relates the two by demonstrating that they are essentially the same, except that one involves a substitutionary principle:

It would appear that the more primitive form of blood covenanting is by inter-mingling, or inter-drinking of the blood of the two parties making the covenant. It would also appear that the time and circumstances have, in many cases, so modified this primitive mode, as to admit of the use of substitute blood as a means of inter-union; and indeed a realistic equivalent of blood-mingling.<sup>3</sup>

There is another explanation for the existence of this practice. It was first set forth by W. R. Smith, who inter-

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1. Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant*, pp. 4,5.
  2. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 176.
  3. Trumbull, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-346.

preted the practice as having originally been a blood-lapping or a blood-sucking custom having to do with sacramental eating of the sacred animal. The blood that was not consumed by the parties ran down the altar and was given to God. By the time the custom evolved into patriarchal times the blood-sucking aspect had been eliminated. This view is untenable, because W. R. Smith's arguments are actually based upon a late Arabic rite, and have no relation to the patriarchal period. He fails to cite an earlier or contemporary parallel, thereby showing that his viewpoint is unhistorical and speculative.<sup>1</sup> Of the two approaches to the blood method of establishing covenants, the first mentioned fits the historical situation the best. On the basis of Trumbull's conclusion the practice can be traced to ancient Assyria, Babylonia, and other cultures of the ancient Near East.<sup>2</sup>

The third incident of animal sacrifice in the patriarchal narratives has a different significance from the two already discussed. The two previously mentioned were covenant-making sacrifices, the third is a sacrifice involving worship. As the two previous ones, it also has many parallels in cultures which were contemporary to the patriarchs.<sup>3</sup> Frazer

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1. Paterson, "Sacrifice," Hastings, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. IV, p. 332.
  2. Trumbull, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
  3. Jeanes, "Old Testament Sacrifice," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 2641.

cites an instance of a ram sacrifice in ancient Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The fact that a golden statuette of a ram caught in a thicket was found in Ur of the Chaldees would further indicate that the practice of offering rams was prevalent in Abraham's time.<sup>2</sup> The similarity between the Chaldean statuette of a ram caught in the thicket and the ram Abraham saw caught in the thicket might be accounted for on the following basis. The Hebrew word "ram" is remarkably close to the Hebrew word, "deer," and therefore may well imply a wild, horned animal. From Albright we learn that wild goats and deer were in abundance in Canaan.<sup>3</sup> If the sacrifice of wild animals was as common as it seems to have been, then the most probable way in which the animals were apprehended was through this self-entanglement in the shrubs and thickets by their horns. The years of outdoor life common to many pastoral peoples of the ancient Near East must have been interspersed with similar finds as that of Abraham's.

b. Application of the Criterion of the Religion of the Primitives

Properly speaking, the practice of blood-covenanting is not a religious rite. Exhaustive studies on primitive religions do not include it as a part of the religion of prim-

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1. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, pp. 500-501.

2. Caiger, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

3. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 92.

itive peoples. It has, however, been a well-known secular practice from the time of Abraham to the present. Livingstone's successful intercourse with native tribes of central Africa is accounted for, in his diary, as being dependent upon the fact that he entered into blood-covenant relationship with almost every tribe chieftain he met. Stanley, who hesitated cutting himself, had one of the whites of his own party do it as a substitute. Years later, after some of the chiefs died, the covenants were still valid, because of the blood relation of the chief to the tribe. The tenacity with which the natives remained faithful to the covenant conditions endured under the most strained relationships between the sometimes unsympathetic Stanley and the natives.<sup>1</sup>

c. Application of the Criterion of Essence

The essence of what transpired between Abraham and God at the time the covenant was made was that Abraham, in the manner common to the day, entered into a covenant with the unique person of God. The practice itself was ordinary, but the party the covenant was ratified by was God. This is at the root of the narrative. The custom used and the animals sacrificed become secondary issues to the fundamental truth that Abraham was entering into a covenant with the one true God. Many similar covenants had been made and many animals

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1. Trumbull, op. cit., pp. 18-28.

slain, but the essence of what happened between Abraham and God was never duplicated. History testifies to the uniqueness of that blood-covenant between Abraham and God.

With reference to Abraham's offering of the ram, it might be said that though the offering of a ram was practiced by many peoples and at many different times, yet Abraham's offering was unique in that it was offered to the true God. This accounts for the miraculous provision of the ram at the particular moment when Abraham was about to slay Isaac in obedience to the true God's command.

#### d. Conclusion

In view of the data known, it must be admitted that animal sacrifice in worship and covenant making was a common practice to the neighbors of the patriarchs. It was the universally accepted method of establishing contracts of the most permanent nature. It was as common to the people of the ancient Near East as the signing of contracts is to modern man. Because of its universal character the practice cannot be said to have originated in any one culture independently of other cultures. It unquestionably was used by the patriarchs because of common knowledge and acceptance of the practice among themselves and other people. The answer to the origin question in the case of this practice is that it was a natural process involving both previous generations and surrounding peoples.

## 2. The Use of Human Sacrifice in Satisfying the Supernatural

### a. Application of the Criterion of Literary Form

From the narrative in chapter 22 regarding Abraham's offering of Isaac, little can be produced to indicate that the practice of human sacrifice was part of the patriarchal religion. In fact just the opposite seems to be indicated. There is evidence that God was not actually interested in the sacrifice of a human being.<sup>1</sup> The incident, as presented, suggests that the practice was either rare or altogether non-existent in Abraham's time. It would appear that the single fact that it was such a special testing would take it out of the ordinary into the exceptional. The fact that the act was not fulfilled would have left an offerer, accustomed to offering human sacrifice, quite disappointed, a condition which cannot be noted in Abraham's attitude of rejoicing. Perhaps the most significant evidence is that of Isaac's asking his father where the lamb for the sacrifice was. If Abraham had previously indulged in human sacrifice it would not have been difficult for his son to see the implication of going up a mountain with wood, knife, and all else except the lamb for the sacrifice. The account clearly suggests that Isaac had no hint that he was to be the sacrifice until he was actually laid upon the altar.

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1. Paterson, "Sacrifice," Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible, p. 331.

b. Application of the Criterion of Essence

The account is saturated with a pure concept of one God, who not only was to be obeyed, but who also expressed pleasure at obedience. As Trumbull indicates, the relationship established by the blood-covenant between God and Abraham was stronger than that of natural generation. The command to offer Isaac was a real test to Abraham of the blood-covenant already made with God.<sup>1</sup> Abraham had to be faithful, and this he sought to be even to the death of his own son. The narrative is based upon a very personal relationship between two persons. Their association and fellowship was keener than that possible through sanguine relations.

c. Application of the Criterion of Historical Method

Oesterley and Robinson intimate that actual evidence which would support the existence of human sacrifice among the Canaanites or the Patriarchs is non-existent. However, they insist on saying that the practice must have been prevalent. They cite as support, the fact that bones of infants were found in jars at Gezer.<sup>2</sup> The view is incorrect, because the dating of the infant bones found in Gezer has been put to about the ninth century B. C., over one thousand years after Abraham's time.

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1. Trumbull, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

2. Oesterley and Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

d. Application of the Criterion of Diffusion.

The dating of the infant bones at Gezer previously given by archaeologists is substantiated by what is known about the diffusion of the practice of human sacrifice. Albright, in his book Archaeology and the Religion of Israel, says the following about the spread of the custom to Palestine: "The extent to which human sacrifice was practiced among the Canaanites has not been clarified by discoveries at Ugarit, which nowhere appear to mention it at all."<sup>1</sup> He points out that traces of the practice seem to have come with later Phoenician influence (1300-700 B. C.). According to Roman witnesses, the Phoenicians took it to Carthage as well as other places.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, the Phoenicians are usually thought the originators of the practice in the ancient Near East, but the influence was not felt in Canaan until much later than Abraham's time. There is no evidence to the contrary.

e. Conclusion

Since data cannot be found that Abraham or his immediate contemporaries practiced human sacrifice, the one incident of Genesis 22 must be taken as a special case which originated with Abraham, or as the account states, with God's command to Abraham.

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1. Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel, pp. 92,93.

2. Ibid., pp. 93,94.



### 3. Scarification or other Physical Mutilation in Covenant Making

#### a. Application of the Criterion of Literary Form

In both instances of bodily mutilation in the patriarchal narratives the religious factor is dominant. In Genesis 17 Abraham accepts the covenant relationship by the practice of circumcision. In Genesis 32 Jacob, after a period of failure with relation to the covenant, is crippled as a new beginning of covenant consciousness came to him. The author nowhere suggests that these incidents had any other implications than those spiritual ones clearly set forth in the narratives and their contexts. In view of this the view that Herodotus and others have held, namely, that circumcision was a hygienic measure, must be rejected.<sup>1</sup>

#### b. Application of the Criterion of Historical Method

For centuries the western world thought the practice of circumcision to be uniquely Hebrew. However, now it is known that the practice was very wide spread.<sup>2</sup> According to some scholars circumcision in Abraham's time stood as a tribal marking or gift offering of a part for the whole.<sup>3</sup> Stade, however, seems to have amassed an abundance of evidence to demonstrate that it was not so much a tribal marking or offer-

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1. Lewis, "Circumcision," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, p. 657.

2. Driver, op. cit., pp. 189-190.

3. Macalister, "Circumcision," Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible, p. 443.

ing as it was an initiatory rite given to a boy when entering manhood.<sup>1</sup> There is only one exception to Stade's conclusion. It is a carving on a temple wall in Karnak depicting the circumcision of two children. However, it should be noticed that even here the case was not exactly similar to Hebrew circumcision, which occurred not in childhood, but in infancy. With this exception, circumcision historically has always been administered to grown boys, at a definite time in their development, either at puberty or some artificially fixed turning point in their lives. Only among the Hebrews was the practice administered consistently in early infancy. This is remarkable, and can only be accounted for on the basis that to the Hebrews the rite had quite a different meaning from that held by Israel's early neighbors.

Driver's reference to the existence of the practice among those people surrounding the early Hebrews is to be questioned, because the only evidence he supports it with are Biblical references made to the practice as used among four surrounding peoples in Jeremiah's time, which obviously does not explain the presence of the practice in patriarchal times.

#### c. Application of the Criterion of Diffusion

Driver quotes Herodotus as stating that the practice of circumcising was first used in Egypt; Herodotus also

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1. Loc. cit.

suggested that diffusion was from that point.<sup>1</sup> It might be well to note that the practice was so wide spread among peoples so far apart from each other that independent development may well account for some instances of it. There also seems to be a good possibility that Israel's practice of circumcision was borrowed by a few surrounding peoples at least. The aggressiveness of Jacob's sons in relation to circumcision, Genesis 34:18-24, would certainly be counted as evidence of Israel's ability to extend the practice to others. Later Biblical references to proselyting may be evidences of an early and forceful desire to affect other peoples. This viewpoint is further enhanced by the suggestion of Dr. Schmidt that it is erroneous to make Israel alone the recipient of foreign ideas and practices.<sup>2</sup>

d. Application of the Criterion of the Religion of the Primitives

The practice of circumcision among primitives belongs to a general group of mutilations involving the male genital organ. To date sub-incision, excision, infibrulation, and a variety of other incisions have been found to exist among primitive peoples.<sup>3</sup> However, in every case it is a religious rite, and it is practiced in connection with initiation, as

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1. Driver, op. cit., p. 189.

2. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 227.

3. Smith, the Missionary and Primitive Man, p. 192.

previously stated by Stade. Also, in all instances of the practice in historical and present time it is associated with ordeals and testing of manly abilities. P. C. Remondino, in his book History of Circumcision, shows the severity and hardship which accompany the rite when given as an initiation.<sup>1</sup> Circumcision among the patriarchs differed much from the practice as known among all known primitives that practice it. Most marked is the fact that it was not accompanied by ordeals or tests common to all primitives. Further, it was done in infancy, a thing also unknown among primitives.

e. Conclusion

The place or time of the origin of circumcision is not clear. It seems to have been a very ancient rite in the ancient Near East. Abraham may well have learned of the practice in his travels to Egypt. However, according to the Biblical account he practiced it only after God had commanded it. Israel may and probably did influence many peoples around her to use the practice also. The difference between Israel's practice of circumcision and that of the surrounding peoples gives a uniqueness to the significance of Hebrew circumcision which may well be accounted for by the supernatural command to practice it recorded in Genesis 17.

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1. Remondino, History of Circumcision.

The lameness of Jacob stands quite apart from natural phenomena. Though both primitive and civilized people recognize the place of injury or illness in accomplishing the ends which God desires, yet even this may not be the explanation for its occurrence. Whatever the real purpose may have been, according to available evidence it was a special case for a special purpose. It was wholly of divine origin.

#### 4. Dreams, Visions, Theophanies and Appearances as Methods of Supernatural Revelation

##### a. Application of the Criterion of Literary Form

If it were not that the choices and decisions of the patriarchs so often are made to depend upon special revelations, the patriarchal narratives would probably be a less controversial issue. Supernatural intervention is limited almost entirely to revelations of one type or another. Geerhardus Vos observes that these revelations become prominent upon Abraham's entrance into the promised land. He also observes that the frequency of revelation increased, but that the mode of revelation became more restricted and guarded.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that the revelations of the Divine will to the patriarchs are pivotal points in early Hebrew religion and history. Their presence is made to account for the Hebrew nation and religion.

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1. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 82.

The one account of a vision in the patriarchal narrative, Genesis 15, would indicate that it involves a conscious visual apprehension. It would seem from the narrative that the work of the outer eye as well as inner thought contribute to the visionary experience.<sup>1</sup> Abraham was able to converse during the vision, and in every other way seemed normal in his reactions.

In contrast to the conscious mental state of the vision, the dream depends upon a semi-conscious state of the mind. Every instance referred to in the narratives implies the presence of sleep. None of the dreams were sought or induced. According to the narratives, they came as a surprise to their owners. They were associated only with the later patriarchs, Jacob and Joseph, not with the two earliest patriarchs.

The theophanies in every instance are described as the most concrete of occurrences. In the case of Abraham and the three strangers, the strangers enter the tent and eat and drink with Sarah as well as Abraham. Every sign points to objective reality in this theophany. Similar elements of reality appear in the other theophanies in the patriarchal narratives. The struggle Jacob had with the mysterious man was so concrete that he rose from it with an injured thigh. There is every reason to believe with Tertullian that the

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1. Ibid., p. 241.

theophanies may have involved actual flesh, since the beings were actually able to consume food.<sup>1</sup> Every instance of a theophany is transitory in nature.

The references to appearances all include audio-visual elements. By this is meant there was verbal contact as well as eye contact. In this sense the appearances resemble the vision. What was said with reference to the vision may therefore apply in large to appearances.

b. Application of the Criterion of Historical Method

As Frazer so adequately demonstrates, the phenomena of dreams, visions, theophanies and appearances of Deity cannot be isolated to Israel and more specifically to the patriarchs.<sup>2</sup> However, though revelation by these methods occurred among most peoples of the ancient Near East, it should be observed that they were always closely associated with divination and inquiries of witches or teraphim.<sup>3</sup> No evidence of such an association is present in the patriarchal records. The simplicity with which these revelations came to the patriarchs is usually not present in such manifestations among the ancient Near East peoples.

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1. Davis and Gehman, *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 601.
  2. Frazer, *Folklore of the Old Testament*, pp. 225-230.
  3. Matthews, *The Religious Pilgrimage of Israel*, p. 130.

c. Application of the Criterion of Religion of the Primitives

The present information of the anthropologists substantiates the fact that revelations in the various forms mentioned exist universally.<sup>1</sup> In almost every instance of occurrence of revelations among the primitives, the dream, vision, or appearance can be induced either by fasting, feasting, or psychological emotional stimulation.<sup>2</sup> Lowie illustrates in a detailed account the inducing of dreams among the Crowe Indians. He observed that with the lack of food and water, nervousness, tension, contortions of the body, and extreme faith, a revelation will come. Lowie also observed that the pattern of the dream induced is reproduced over and over again by different individuals, so much so that the form is distinctly conventionalized.<sup>3</sup> Other primitives believe in the flight of the soul from the body during dreams.<sup>4</sup> These characteristic features of dreams among primitives are not detectable in the patriarchal narratives.

d. Conclusion

The phenomena of dreams, visions, theophanies, and appearances of Deity for the purposes of revelation are common to most peoples of the earth. The phenomena are less

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1. Wallis, *The Religion in Primitive Society*, pp. 172-176.
  2. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
  3. Lowie, *op. cit.*, p. 8-11.
  4. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 89.



noticeable among the civilized peoples. Since the phenomena are never induced or sought by the patriarchs, there must have been something unique about them as they appeared to the patriarchs.<sup>1</sup> If the revelations were genuine supernatural revelations, as the accounts seem to indicate, then the question of origin is settled.

## 5. The Tithe

### a. Application of the Criterion of Literary Form

According to the Biblical narratives tithe-giving seems to have been a natural procedure to the patriarchs. No special revelation is mentioned in connection with its institution. Abraham seems to have readily offered the tithe according to Genesis 14:20, and Jacob seems to have promised it just as readily in Genesis 28:10-22.

It is to be noted that the patriarchal tithe was given either to God or a priest of God. It was given voluntarily, and as Dillman stressed, it was given of all that a man possessed, even the spoils of war.<sup>2</sup> In view of these statements it is hardly possible that the compulsory institution made by Joseph in 47:24, which required that all Egyptians give one fifth of their crop to Pharaoh, could be considered a tithe such as the patriarchs gave. The later Mosaic tithe similarly differed from the patriarchal tithe in that it was a legis-

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1. Jevons, "Dreams," Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible, p. 622.  
 2. Dillman, Genesis, vol. II, p. 51.

lated tithe. However, although it is true that no legislation governed the patriarchal tithe, it is also true that society may exert more pressure upon an individual than legislation sometimes can.

b. Application of the Criterion of Historical Method

The practice of tithing to the supernatural via a priest or sanctuary was a widely diffused custom in antiquity.<sup>1</sup> The Lydians, Phoenicians, Carthagians, Greeks, and Babylonians all practiced some form of tithe-giving.<sup>2</sup> The custom seems, in some cases, to have been regular and in others occasional. From what is known today the tithe was not isolated to Israel. In one manner or another it was found among most of Israel's contemporaries, as stated above. Abraham's motivation for tithe-giving may have been quite voluntary but at the same time unavoidable because of a common custom practiced by the people of his time.

c. Conclusion

There is no evidence at present to determine the tithe's ultimate origin. If the practice reached the many cultures in which it was found by diffusion, then obviously it must have originated at some particular time and place; but there is no way to determine what time and what place.

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1. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

2. Davis and Gehman, *op. cit.*, p. 609.

The practice of tithe-giving may have been closely related to the offering of the first fruits. Both practices involve recognition of a higher authority who deserves a portion of that which one calls his own. If this is the case, then the custom's form may have been adopted from surrounding people, and the content or meaning supplied by the patriarchs, who were conscious of the creatorship and ownership of God. Beyond this it is impossible to judge with historical accuracy the origin of tithing. The fact that the patriarchs gave their tithe to the one true God made their giving unique. Tithing to the genuine God resulted in genuine blessing, a thing which accounted for Israel's unmatched history.

6. The Use of Material Objects in Worship, Devotion, and in Commemoration of Important Experiences or Unusual Events

a. Application of the Criterion of Literary Form

References to material objects used in patriarchal life for religious or semi-religious purposes are many; however, trees, altars, stones, and idols are sufficient to illustrate the problems involved.

Trees are prominent in the patriarchal religious experience, because some revelations were received at or near trees. Two things are to be noticed about the presentation of the accounts which involve trees: (1) there is no mention of a spirit or power ever having resided in the tree, and (2) that revelations came to the patriarchs at other places besides trees.

In the patriarchal narratives altars are for the purpose of offering sacrifice and marking places where the patriarchs had great religious experiences. The major altars established were at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, Moriah, and Beer-sheba, which were places that one or more of the patriarchs personally visited. In no narrative does the author even hint at Deity dwelling in the altar, as W. R. Smith suggests.<sup>1</sup>

As Abraham's religious experience was closely associated with trees, so Jacob's was with stones. The use of stones does not appear in the narratives of the other patriarchs. The reference to the use of stones for a memorial, 35:20, for a witness, 31:45, and in connection with revelation, 28:11, cause no unusual difficulty. In these three cases the stones appear as secondary elements in the religious experiences of Jacob. The discussion with reference to the trees may be applied to these three instances of the use of stones. One instance of the use of a stone for religious purposes by Jacob does have stone-worship connotations, 35:14. Here it is recorded that Jacob set up a pillar of stone and poured out a drink-offering upon it. Driver suggests that it was an actual anointing of the stone.<sup>2</sup> This may be true, but the same record says that when Jacob spoke, he spoke not to the

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1. Smith, W. R., *Religion of the Semites*, p. 180.  
2. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

stone but to God. The anointing may well have involved a setting apart of the stone as a place where God had been met.

The teraphim or idols referred to in Genesis 31:19 and 30-35, cannot be construed to have anything to do with Jacob's own religious life. Rachel, who was brought up in Laban's idolatrous household, apparently so depended upon her father's idols that when the time came for her to leave home she stole the idols. Her desire and theft were apparently hidden from Jacob until he discovered the idols. When the critical moment came, Jacob did not hesitate to do away with them.

b. Application of the Criterion of Historical Method

According to Frazer there is an abundance of oaks in Palestine and Syria. The terebinth variety of the oak is most common in southern Palestine. At one time the wooded sections were more numerous but as the populations grew trees became scarce. Often times trees grew in an isolated fashion in the middle of plain areas.<sup>1</sup> Travelers often used them as resting places and the natives found them comfortable in the hot sun.<sup>2</sup> Herein may lie the reason behind Abraham's close association with them.

Altars of several varieties used by the Hebrews have been found in Canaan. Those that are wrought of metal and

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1. Frazer, op. cit., p. 323.

2. Post, "Trees," Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible, p. 809.

wood belong to the Mosaic and post-Mosaic period. Those made of earth and unhewn stones piled together are characteristic of the pre-Mosaic period.<sup>1</sup> Buchanan Gray quotes Kittel as saying that altars in Canaan before 2500 B. C. had hollowed out places in the rock surface for libations of blood, and altars after 1500 B. C. were distinctly made for burnt-offerings.<sup>2</sup> The use of altars was not unique to Israel. Though the number of Canaanitish altars has probably been greatly exaggerated, yet there is evidence that the people surrounding the patriarchs did use them.

The use of stones in connection with religious and semi-religious practice is said to be quite ancient.<sup>3</sup> Oesterley and Robinson discuss stone-worship in the Old Testament quite thoroughly. They broaden the belief to include hills and mountains.<sup>4</sup> Frazer and others gather instances of stone-worship and stone-reverence from many cultures and from different times, and thus accumulatively build up evidence to show stone-worship among the patriarchs. Actually what the Arabs do with the Black Stone at Mecca has nothing to do with the patriarchal use of stones. Particular historical evidence to show that stone-worship existed among the patriarchs is lacking.

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1. Wiener, "Altars," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, p. 107.
  2. Gray, Sacrifice in the Old Testament, p. 97.
  3. Skinner, Genesis, p. 378.
  4. Oesterley and Robinson, op. cit., pp. 42-47.

c. Application of the Criterion of Essence

The Biblical accounts reveal a thorough-going monotheism. The trees, though having a place in worship, are quite secondary to the God of the covenant. It is true that the trees provided locals for the worship of God, but what can be expected of a pastoral people without a tabernacle, temple, synagogue, or church building? Where would they go to worship? Wherever they went they would be where natural objects were. It must be remembered that trees had a very definite place in the daily lives of the patriarchs. As they traveled from place to place, many times over unmarked grazing ground, the trees often were used as landmarks. Then, too, the hot Palestinian sun was probably often escaped because of the shade of a lonely tree. No doubt wise Abraham many times pitched his tent in the shade of a tree for the greatest comfort possible. His life must have been so closely related to trees that when God appeared it was often while Abraham was near or at a tree.

The necessity for an altar rose out of animal sacrifice. The sacrifice may have preceded the altar, but not by much. The wide-spread use of the sacrifice and altar defy discovery of origin. Whatever may have been the historic relation between the use of altars among the patriarchs and among the surrounding pagan people, it must be admitted that the monotheism I. G. Matthews insists that the patriarchs

had must have pervaded this practice. True, the patriarchs used the form of something pagan people used, but that form was filled with a new and vital content. The fact that the patriarchs used altars need not have any more significance than the fact that modern Christians use churches. The use of altars was not limited to patriarchal life any more than the use of buildings for worship is limited to Christian life.

The general use of stones by Jacob can be justified, but the specific case in 35:14, it must be admitted, borders on actual stone-worship. However, not all religious practices involving stones are experiences of worship or cultic.<sup>1</sup> Jacob referred to the stone at Bethel as the "house of God." If this is to be understood as Jacob's meaning that God dwelt in the stone, then what shall be said of Christians who call a building the house of God? If Jacob's anointing or dedicating of the stone implies that the stone was Deity then what shall be said of Christians who dedicate buildings, children and institutions? A god who resided in the stone at Bethel is highly incompatible with the God who went to Egypt with Jacob and the God who met Jacob in other places besides Bethel. Jacob's God was a personal God, distinct from nature. He was a God who made covenants involving moral responsibility

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1. Smith, *The Missionary and the Primitive*, p. 175.



on the part of Himself and man.<sup>1</sup> This kind of a God is not a stone God, He is the God who is creator of the stone, dwelling above and beyond the limitations of this material creation.

d. Application of the Criterion of the Religion of the Primitives

The belief in the sacredness of trees is a widespread belief even in modern times. Anthropologists have succeeded in crystalizing the rather vague beliefs involving tree worship, and have discovered that tree worship is essentially a cult, that is, the human being cares for the sacred tree, and in return the tree watches over him.<sup>2</sup> To the savage this tree is believed to be alive, to hear, feel hurt, and to bleed when wounded. Dendrolatry (tree cult) often is closely associated with fetishism and ancestor worship. If the tree is thought to be alive, the worship is then considered purely cultic. If the tree is simply the abode of a spirit and is worshipped, then the worship involves fetishism. In ancestor worship the trees are thought to be indwelt by the souls of the dead.<sup>3</sup> In many cases trees are planted around graves, and by this acquire sacred characteristics. Trees which are sacred are often taboo.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 106.

2. Smith, *The Missionary and Primitive Man*, p. 167.

3. Clodd, *Animism*, p. 74.

4. Wallis, *Religion in Primitive Society*, pp. 43-56.

It is true that these facts concerning trees in worship are gleaned from modern primitives, and as such do not necessarily explain the patriarchal use of the tree in religion. However, it must be kept in mind that the interpretation of the religion of the past made by the critical scholars was and is based upon the religions of the present-day savages.<sup>1</sup> It is only proper then to take all that is known of tree worship, and observe what part corresponds to the patriarchal use of the trees. When this is done it will be noticed that the Biblical accounts give absolutely no evidence of actual worship of trees or of the conception that life is in them.

e. Conclusion

The use of material objects by the patriarchs in worship, devotion, and commemoration of great events may well be a parallel to the modern religious practice involving the use of church buildings, altars, and various vessels. The incidents referred to are free from any type of worship which was distinctly non-monotheistic. As to how the use of material objects in question came to be known among the patriarchs, the following may be said: (1) that the practice of using some natural objects in worship may be developed independently; (2) that most surrounding cultures may have used them, and therefore by contact may either have influenced Israel, or have been influenced by Israel, or perhaps the in-

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1. LeRoy, op. cit., p. 283.

fluence was mutual as is so often the case when there is inter-course of people of two different cultures. At any rate, there seems to be little need of a supernatural intervention for explaining the presence of these practices except as new meaning is poured into the old and well-known practices.

## 7. The Practice of Polygyny

### a. Application of the Criterion of Literary Form

The custom of having a multiplicity of wives at first seems to be quite marked in the patriarchal narratives. Upon consideration it is to be noted that the tendency is toward monogamy. Soares, in his book on social institutions and ideals in the Bible, points this out: "It is seen in the apology for Abraham on account of the childlessness of Sarah, and of Jacob on account of the deception of Laban."<sup>1</sup> This is further evidenced by the lives of Isaac and Joseph, which were free from polygyny.<sup>2</sup>

### b. Application of the Criterion of the Religion of the Primitives

According to religio-social patterns of modern primitives, concubinage is not considered as polygyny. Sometimes it is more desired by the wife than the husband. Under such conditions the marriage is still considered monogamous. Something of the sort must have existed in Abraham's day, for when both Sarah and Hagar had sons, then the servant woman,

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1. Soares, *The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible*, p. 44.

2. *Loc. cit.*

Hagar, had to give way to the real wife, Sarah.

c. Conclusion

The origin of the custom may well have come from the practice of the surrounding peoples, or it may have been developed independently as a social and economic necessity similar to the Mormon practice of some years ago in America.

C. Determination of Which Explanation  
Best Fits the Facts

1. Isolated Supernaturalism as an Explanation for the Origin of the Ideas and Practices in Question

As it has been noticed there is some cause to accept the supernaturalistic origin of the ideas and practices in question. However, the difficulties of the view are so great that it must be questioned as a plausible explanation. At root, there are two reasons why it cannot be accepted as the explanation of the origin of the ideas and practices in question.

a. The first of these faults lies in its disregard of natural processes in culture diffusion

It has been discovered that in at least the case of animal sacrifice in covenant making, in the use of material objects in worship and devotion, and in tithing that the natural processes of cultural diffusion were at work. The patriarchs may have had a different and deeper content in their practices than did their neighbors, but they had the same form, and that form is definitely traceable to the

surrounding cultures. To reject the natural processes of culture diffusion, which have been proved to have existed during man's entire history, is to enter into the gravest of errors. The fault is alarming in view of the fact that one of supernaturalism's strongest apologetics is built upon the historical diffusion of the idea of a Supreme Being, so well described by Schmidt in his book on the origin and growth of religion.<sup>1</sup>

- b. The second fault lies in the necessity of an isolated culture

This fault grows out of the previous one. If there is no culture diffusion and no culture interchange then Israel's culture was very much isolated. However, from what has been discovered through the application of the criterion of literary form, the author never intended to portray patriarchal culture as an isolated culture. Canaan is pictured as the thoroughfare of the ancient world. Not only did other peoples come to Canaan, but the semites of the land traveled to other lands.<sup>2</sup> What better evidence of this can be found than the travels of Abraham into Egypt and the final Egyptian stay of the whole Israelitish nation, which, according to Yahuda, left linguistic and cultural marks upon the

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1. Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, pp. 287-290.  
2. Caiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 44.

Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> The application of the historical method also revealed the fallacy of thinking in terms of an isolated culture. Many of the patriarchs' ideas and practices had exact parallels with those ideas and practices in other cultures. The fact is inescapable, the patriarchs were in social and commercial intercourse with the multitudes of people they lived among and touched in their travels. It is true that isolated cultures have appeared in human history; however, it can be pointed out that true isolation results from geographical conditions as in the development of isolated Australian cultures.<sup>2</sup> While isolation has occurred in a few exceptional cases, it cannot be said that patriarchal Palestine was so situated that isolation might occur. In fact with their nomadic lives it was almost impossible.

## 2. Evolutionary Naturalism

Evolutionary naturalism's hitherto acceptance lies in the fact that it seemed to be the only way of logically accounting for the existence of a culture at a given time. Every period depended upon the previous periods. As man anatomically progressed so did his material, social, and spiritual cultures progress. Without commenting directly

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1. Yahuda, *The Accuracy of the Bible*, pp. 3-62.

2. Kroeber, *op. cit.*, pp. 492-505.

upon the questionableness of the whole process it can be demonstrated that this explanation of the origins of the ideas and practices in question is not a plausible explanation.

- a. It is not needed to explain the origin of the ideas and practices in question

Those ideas and practices which have been demonstrated to have come to the patriarchs through the process of cultural diffusion are exhibits to the effect that evolution is not the explanation for their origin.

- b. It complicates the interpretation of the historical facts, and makes a definite statement of origin impossible

The introduction of the evolutionary principle into the question of the problem of origins complicates the testimony of the discovered historical facts of diffusion, and makes it impossible to say definitely that an idea or practice came simply by diffusion. In view of the fact that diffusion is the most commonly accepted method given for the growth of cultures,<sup>1</sup> it must be insisted upon that unless evolution can be shown to be a more adequate explanation it is not plausible.

- c. It eliminates all reference to the supernatural

The data accumulated necessitates that some ideas and practices, or parts thereof, be explained only on the basis of supernatural intervention. Such things as theophanies and the deep monotheistic content involved in all patriarchal

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1. Cf. statements under title "Criterion of Diffusion" in Chapter II.

religious acts deny explanation by evolution as well as diffusion. Nowhere have a people ever been known to proceed to monotheism from polytheism.<sup>1</sup> This testimony of anthropology harmonizes with the Biblical account of where the patriarchs received their strong monotheism. They did not receive it from the surrounding polytheistic peoples or as a result of self-evolution from polytheism, but from a historical knowledge of the one God which was quickened over and over again by new Divine revelations explainable only on a supernaturalistic basis. Since evolutionary naturalism disregards this important aspect of patriarchal religion it must forfeit its right to be called a plausible explanation of the ideas and practices in question.

### 3. The Religio-Historical Explanation for the Origin of Ideas and Practices in Question

This explanation most completely meets the requirements of the data observed, and therefore as an over-all explanation is the most plausible. Its five merits amply demonstrate its plausibility as an explanation for the origin of the ideas and practices examined.

#### a. It is thoroughly scientific

With this approach all data having to do with the items in question are respected and examined, all speculative and subjective elements are eliminated, all facts which can

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1. Schmidt, Primitive Revelation, p. 149.



be checked with contemporaneous cultures are checked, and finally only that which is actually discovered is stated, regardless of bias.

- b. It does not violate the findings yielded by the application of the criteria

Of the criteria in question perhaps the two most violated are that of literature, violated by evolutionary naturalism, and that of diffusion, violated by isolated supernaturalism. It is precisely on these points that the religio-historical method insists on fairness. The natural historical elements of diffusion are accepted as well as the testimony of the oldest record bearing on the matter.

- c. It allows for the natural elements

The practice of blood-covenanting can only be accounted for by natural elements. Similarly circumcision and the use of material objects are unquestionably, at least partly due to the natural processes of culture contacting. With this explanation it is possible to account for these proven natural influences upon the patriarchal life and religion.

- d. It allows for the supernatural element

Evolutionary naturalism as an explanation for the origin of the ideas and practices in question rules out the possibility of the supernatural element. If the results of criteria of literature and essence mean anything, then the supernatural element must be permitted to account for some of

the otherwise unaccountable elements in the patriarchal ideas and practices in question.

- e. It is open to further change as new historical data are discovered

Since at root the religio-historical explanation is not a philosophical explanation, but a scientific explanation, allowing for supernatural elements which cannot be eliminated, it has no prejudices or bias. It does not defend an assumption or embrace a fixed conclusion. Therefore, as new evidence is produced it can assimilate it and profit from the contribution.

These are reasons that stand the test of scrutiny. They prove beyond question the validity of the religio-historical explanation as an explanation for the origin of the ideas and practices surveyed in chapter I.

#### D. Summary

It has been the purpose of this chapter to apply the criteria of chapter II to the ideas and practices surveyed in chapter I, and to suggest which of the three explanations, offered for the origin of the ideas and practices, is most plausible.

The results of applying the criteria to the ideas and practices in question indicated the following: (1) the practice of animal sacrifice in worship and covenant making was universal and probably found its way into the patriarchal

culture by diffusion; (2) the practice of human sacrifice for the purpose of satisfying the supernatural was a rare practice in Canaan at that time and it was probably never before practiced by Abraham and as such was a special case prompted by God; (3) the practice of mutilation of the body (circumcision) was well known, and was therefore probably received in part by diffusion from other cultures, while Jacob's lameness was special and can only be accounted for by the supernatural; (4) the phenomena of revelation by dreams, visions, theophanies, and divine appearances, though having parallels among many other peoples, must have been very definitely supernatural in origin among the patriarchs; (5) the tithe was a universally established custom and may have come to the patriarchs by diffusion; (6) the use of material objects by the patriarchs in connection with their religion was a universally known practice, but differed from similar practices among surrounding people in content as do most of the ideas and practices in question; (7) the practice of polygyny was known among Israel's early neighbors and may have been assimilated from them; however, it is also possible that the practice was developed independently for social or economic reasons.

With reference to the most plausible explanation for the overall origin of the ideas and practices in question, the following was pointed out. First, it was indicated that is-

olated supernaturalism was not valid because it disregarded the natural fact of culture diffusion and necessitated an isolated culture which could not have been true of Israel's culture. Second, evolutionary naturalism was judged not valid because it is superfluous, all problems being answered by other explanations; it complicates explanation on a historical basis; and it eliminates all reference to the supernatural. Third, the religio-historical explanation was accepted as a valid over-all explanation for the origin of the ideas and practices in question, because it is scientific, it does not violate the findings yielded by the application of the criteria, it allows for the natural elements, it permits the supernatural element, and it is found to be open for further change as new and vital evidence is discovered.

## SUMMARY

## SUMMARY

The acceptance of the patriarchal narratives of Genesis as historical has opened the ground for the further question as to the origin of the ideas and practices related to those narratives. It has been the purpose of this thesis to seek an answer to the question of the origin of certain ideas and practices. The study was begun in chapter I by a survey of the chosen ideas and practices. The survey involved the grouping and descriptions of the following ideas and practices: (1) the use of animal sacrifice in worship and covenant making; (2) the use of human sacrifice in satisfying the supernatural; (3) the use of scarification or other physical mutilations in covenant making; (4) the belief in dreams, visions, theophanies and appearances of Deity as methods of supernatural revelation; (5) the tithe; (6) the use of material objects in worship, devotion, and commemoration of important religious experiences or unusual events; and (7) the practice of polygyny. After this was accomplished, the three explanations usually associated with the question of origin were described and set forth with a brief account of the causes for their historical development. The three explanations were: (1) "isolated supernaturalism," which attributes the origin of ideas and practices to God; (2) "evolutionary naturalism," which explains all origins by a combination of the evolution-

ary theory and natural historical causes; and (3) the "Religio-Historical" explanation, which admits all the necessary natural factors, but does not exclude the religious or supernatural element from entering into the origin of the ideas and practices in question.

It was then deemed best to set forth suitable criteria by which the most plausible explanation might be reached. This was done in chapter II. The criteria set forth were as follows: (1) the criterion of literary form, which has to do with the content and purpose of the narratives where the ideas and practices occur; (2) the criterion of historical method, which concerns itself with the recognition that there are historical backgrounds out of which come the ideas and practices in question; (3) the criterion of diffusion, which deals with the dissemination of an idea or practice in history; (4) the criterion of essence, which refers to the innermost meaning of the idea or practice; and (5) the criterion of the religion of the primitives, which has to do with existence of similar ideas and practices known among contemporary primitive populations.

The final chapter of the thesis involved the bringing together of the criteria and the ideas and practices in question, and the determination of the most plausible explanation in view of the facts discovered.

In the first half of the chapter it was concluded that the practice of animal sacrifice, bodily mutilation, tithing, and the use of material objects in religious and semi-religious functions were customs of the day used by many of Israel's neighbors. It was also concluded that they differed considerably from the non-Israelite use of them in that they were definitely monotheistically centered. The conclusion was reached that the approach to the practice of human sacrifice was definitely of supernatural prompting and was an exception. It was also concluded that revelation by means of dreams, visions, theophanies, and divine appearances was, of necessity, supernatural in origin. However, these means were not without their somewhat similar yet different parallels in other cultures. It was also concluded that polygyny may have either developed independently or resulted from diffusion of a prevalent custom of the day.

In the last half of chapter III the three explanations introduced in chapter I were discussed in relation to their validity as over-all explanations for the origin of the ideas and practices in question. It was concluded that isolated supernaturalism and evolutionary naturalism are not valid, primarily on the basis that they are not explanations based upon historical findings. In one way or another they violated the findings of one or more of the criteria discovered earlier in the chapter. In contrast to these non-historical explana-



tions, the explanation called the religio-historical explanation was demonstrated to be a valid explanation for the origin of the ideas and practices in question, mainly because it admitted both the natural and supernatural elements.

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