

CONTRADICTIONS AND DIVERGENCES

The most serious discrepancy in the entire Book of Genesis is the difference between the two records of the names of the three wives of Esau. In the section dealing with the 'history' of Isaac (Gen. xxvi 34, xxviii 9) it is stated that Esau took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son; whereas according to the 'history' of Esau (*ibid.* xxxvi 2-3), his wives were: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, and Basemath Ishmael's daughter. This is an explicit inconsistency that cannot possibly be reconciled; all the efforts of the harmonizers to do so have failed. There are many other passages in Genesis that contradict one another, or appear to do so, but the majority of them form part of the duplicate narratives, which constitute a special subject of study, and on which I propose to speak tomorrow. As for the minority of these conflicting texts, which contain discrepancies between isolated data (such as the names of Esau's wives), they need not be detailed here, since my observations on the present case are equally valid for the other disparities of this kind.

At first blush, it would seem that the documentary hypothesis enables us to explain all these incongruities without the least difficulty: one of the discrepant passages emanates from one source, the other from another source. But in truth this explanation fails to explain anything; for by exculpating the author from the responsibility for the contradiction and putting the blame on the redactor, we gain nothing. We have merely shifted the problem from one place to another without solving it. An editor who does his work conscientiously is obliged to avoid inconsistencies not less than the author, possibly even more so. Nor is it feasible to maintain that the redactor was aware of the disparity but did not dare to tamper with the sources, for on other occasions we are told repeatedly that he erased or omitted or altered or added exactly as he was minded. Furthermore it is inconceivable that just in the case of Esau's wives the editor adopted an attitude of meticulous respect for the source, since according to the generally accepted view with regard to the distribution of the sources, both the list of Esau's wives given in the section of Isaac's 'history' and the whole of Esau's 'history' are attributed to P; thus the higher critics are compelled to assume that