

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE X.

DR. DRIVER'S PROOF-TEXTS.¹

BY G. FREDERICK WRIGHT.

IN further proof that the Pentateuch employs language "implying that the period of the Exodus lay in the past, and that Israel is established in Canaan,"² Dr. Driver adduces Deut. ii. 12b, which reads, "As Israel did unto the land of his possession which the Lord gave unto them." But this is ordinarily and easily explained, on the theory of Mosaic authorship, by regarding it, with perhaps the whole of the two preceding verses, as a parenthetical explanatory addition by a later hand. No one could reasonably object to the supposition that a limited number of such additions have been made. The textual criticism of the New Testament has familiarized us both with the fact of such clerical additions in manuscripts undergoing repeated copying, and also with their limitations and characteristics. By general consent, this is preëminently the kind of explanation most likely to creep into a manuscript in the process of transmission. It may, however, with a fair show of reason, be maintained that this is not such an addition, but that Moses is here referring to the conquests of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, already effected on the east side of Jordan.

Deut. iii. 11 is Dr. Driver's next proof-text. This passage relates that Og's bedstead was a bedstead of iron, add-

¹ Continued from July, 1898, p. 525.

² Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (sixth edition), p. 124.

ing, "Is it not in Rabbah of the children of Ammon." Dr. Driver interprets this clause as indicating that Og's bedstead is "a relic of antiquity." But such an interpretation is entirely gratuitous. It may as well be that it is referred to as "a memorial of a recent victory."

Dr. Driver is also himself careful to add, in a separate clause, that these last two passages, as well as Deut. iii. 14, might "indeed in themselves be treated as glosses." But he insists that "the attempts that have been made to reconcile the other passages with Moses' authorship must strike every impartial reader as forced and artificial." With reference to the soundness of this judgment, we will refer the reader to our examination of them in a previous number of the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA*.¹

Dr. Driver further fortifies this selected body of inconsequential proof-texts by referring to other passages of Deuteronomy quoted on p. 82f. of his volume. On turning to this page, we find that the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy is rejected, on the ground that Deuteronomy "speaks regularly, not of Sinai, but of Horeb (as Ex. iii. 1; xvii. 6; xxxiii. 6)." The only argument in favor of Dr. Driver's position which can be drawn from this fact is that this usage is thought to show that Deuteronomy was written earlier than those portions of the Pentateuch which are denominated the Priest Code, and indicated by P, which use the word Sinai instead of Horeb; and, as Deuteronomy is post-Mosaic, P must be still later. But it should be observed, as will appear in a striking case adduced a little later, that the supposed identification of the disjointed members of the Priest Code has been accomplished by methods that are largely arbitrary, and that very likely passages containing Horeb have been excluded by the critics from the Priest Code because of the occurrence of this word in them. We might also turn the argument around,

¹ Vol. lv. (July, 1898), pp. 515-525.

and say that the Priest Code was written before Deuteronomy, and before the passages in Exodus using the term Horeb; for, how else should a writer who knew that the names of both Sinai and Horeb were used to designate the holy mountain limit himself to one of them? The facts as Dr. Driver uses them will prove one alternative as well as another, i.e. they prove neither. Dr. Driver has drawn his inferences from only half of the facts.

The truth is that the critics here have discovered a mare's nest. Deuteronomy is preëminently a rhetorical book, and it is impossible for us, at this distance of time and place, fully to understand the rhetorical motives which led to the use of one word rather than the other. It should be noted, also, that Dr. Driver is careful to say that Deuteronomy speaks "regularly," not of Sinai, but of Horeb, for he was well aware that there was one exception, namely, Deut. xxxiii. 2, an exception which he does not deign to explain except by a footnote which would indicate that the whole of the thirty-third chapter had been incorporated into the book from independent sources.

A second passage referred to on page 82 is Deut. xi. 6, which alludes to the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram, but is silent as to Korah. This is thought to be a significant circumstance. To the considerate reader, however, it will seem that when, in a discourse of the length of Deuteronomy, a selection of historical illustrations is made, and only a single sentence is given to summarizing two chapters, the inferences which can be drawn from omission of reference are of the slightest value.

A third illustration on this same page is drawn from the omission of Joshua's name (Deut. i. 36) in a passing reference to the report of the spies. Deuteronomy i. 36 affirms that not one of this evil generation should see the good land, "save Caleb the son of Jephunneh"; whereas, in the portion of the narrative referring to the matter in Num-

bers and assigned to the Priest Code, both Caleb and Joshua are mentioned. The reasoning is, that, if the writer of Deuteronomy had known of the reference to Joshua in the so-called Priest Code, he also would have mentioned him, together with Caleb, in the present connection. Therefore Deuteronomy is later than the Jehovistic narrative, and the Priest Code later than Deuteronomy.

But here, as elsewhere, the whole reasoning of Dr. Driver is vitiated by two fatal defects. In the first place, he fails to take into consideration the exegetical significance of the professedly rhetorical character of the book of Deuteronomy. In such a summary of facts as is adapted to popular address, we are not to look for fullness of detail. In the present instance the references to Caleb and Joshua in Deuteronomy are as distinct and definite as could be expected in so short a summary. It is true that the writer of Deuteronomy says that none of the men of that evil generation should enter the good land, "save Caleb the son of Jephunneh" (i. 35, 36), omitting the name of Joshua in that verse. But the relations of Joshua to Moses were such that he stood in a unique position, and would more naturally be mentioned as he is in a following sentence. In Num. xxvii. 18-23 we have an account of the formal installation of Joshua as the successor to Moses, an installation which was repeated in Deut. xxxi. 14, 23.

Now, returning to the references in the first chapter of Deuteronomy, we find that the statement, that none of the men save Caleb is to enter into the land, is qualified by the statement in verse 38 that Joshua is to go in, therefore "encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it." This statement regarding Joshua is preceded by the statement that the Lord was angry with Moses, so that he could not enter. The propriety of giving prominence to Joshua's official relation amply justifies the omission of details in such a summary as Deuteronomy professes to be, and ac-

counts for the form in which the facts are there alluded to.

Secondly, it is instructive to notice, in this passage, the arbitrary method pursued by Dr. Driver in analyzing the narrative. He refers us from page 82 to page 63 for further details. On turning to this page, we find an elaborate discussion of the composite nature of Numbers xiii. and xiv., which contain the narrative of the spies. These we find to be assigned to P and JE in such a manner that P contains the only references that are made to Joshua; while an effort is made to show that the two narratives are to some extent self-contradictory, and that these apparent discrepancies can be accounted for in no other way than by supposing that two contradictory original narratives were put together by an incompetent editor *a long while after the original events*. This theory, however, is purely gratuitous, for the combination of apparently conflicting accounts might as naturally arise from the difficulty a contemporary historian would have in condensing a brief account of such complicated transactions.

In modern phrase we should say, that this committee of twelve, sent to spy out the land, made a "majority" and a "minority" report, Caleb being chairman of the minority, whose report is briefly characterized in Num. xiii. 30. But the majority report prevailed with the people, and led to an incipient rebellion, some incidents of which are related in chapter xiv. At this crisis, Joshua came forward with Caleb to stem the tide of opposition. A special reason for mentioning only Caleb's name in verse 24 as one who is exempted from the general curse is that a definite promise had been made to him that his seed should possess Hebron, a promise which is claimed by Caleb after Joshua had partially conquered the region (Josh. xiv. 6-15).

Still another apparent discrepancy in this account in Numbers is that JE represents the spies as calling the land a fertile one; whereas P represents them as saying that the

land is one which "eateth up the inhabitants thereof," which expression Dr. Driver thinks can only mean that it is an impoverished land, not worth conquering. To sustain this exegesis he refers to Lev. xxvi. 38 and Ezek. xxxvi. 13. But, on turning to the passage in Ezekiel, the reader finds that the land is said to be one which eateth up men, not because of its natural barrenness, but because of special judgments of God upon its people; and this accords with the general statement of the passage in Numbers. Pestilence or difficulty of defense against enemies may have been the evils magnified in the majority report.

Or, if Dr. Driver should still insist on his interpretation of the phrase, it is by no means inconsistent with the character of such a committee as this was, that they should shift their ground in course of the argument, and magnify the terrors of those portions of the land through which they had passed which were barren and inhospitable. No great length of time is required, in such a deadly controversy as this was, to work up conflicting accounts in the reports of such a partisan committee.

Another reason given by Dr. Driver for discrediting this account in Numbers is that P and JE differ as to the starting-point of the spies. To P he assigns xiii. 3 and 26, which say that the spies started from the wilderness of Paran and returned again to the children of Israel in the wilderness of Paran. But he infers from Num. xxxii. 8; Deut. i. 19; Josh. xiv. 16, that JE represents them as starting from Kadesh. It is difficult, however, to see how there can be any discrepancy in such references when there is so great an uncertainty, at the present time, as to what were the limits of Paran, and what was the position of Kadesh. And this leads us to notice a characteristic feat of critical analysis. The passage which we have just referred to (Num. xiii. 25, 26) expressly says that the spies returned "unto the wilderness of Paran to Kadesh,"

which would be like saying that a person came back to England, to London. But just here Dr. Driver draws his pen through the middle of verse 26, and assigns Kadesh to JE, leaving Paran with P, and then proceeds to draw his argument from the assumed fact that JE starts his spies from Kadesh, and P from Paran! It is thus that, while turning around in a circle of his own creation, he deludes himself with the thought that he is advancing in a cumulative argument.

In view of these exposures we may dismiss without further notice the "&c." with which Dr. Driver here seeks to bring his argument to a climax.

The only remaining point, in this summary of strong proofs adduced by Dr. Driver, is, that "the laws, also, in many of their details, presuppose (and do not merely *anticipate*) institutions and social relations, which can hardly have grown up except among a people which had been for some time settled in a permanent home" (p. 124). Reserving the consideration of this statement to a later number, we will close the present examination with some remarks upon the author's conflicting statements concerning the use of writing in the time of Moses.

Upon page 158, Dr. Driver earnestly protests against the assertion "that the primary basis of Pentateuchal criticism is the assumption that Moses was unacquainted with the art of writing, and that this has been completely overthrown by the Tel el-Amarna tablets," which, he says, "rests upon an entire misapprehension of the facts. As the absence of all mention of the supposed basis in the preceding pages will have shown, it is *not* the premise upon which the criticism of the Pentateuch depends: the antiquity of writing was known long before the Tel el-Amarna tablets were discovered; and these tablets (though deeply interesting on account of their historical contents) have no bearing on the question either of the composite

structure of the Pentateuch, or of the date of the documents of which it is composed."

But on page 125, in the summary of argument which we have been considering, we find Dr. Driver asserting without reservation that "in the early stages of a nation's history the memory of the past is preserved habitually by oral tradition; and the Jews, long after they were possessed of a literature, were still apt to depend much upon tradition."

Remarking upon these two quotations, it is pertinent to say that some of the earlier advocates of the divisive criticism did oracularly assert that Moses was unacquainted with the art of writing. And even now it seems, that, while Dr. Driver yields that point, he still strenuously maintains the universal proposition that "in the early stages of a nation's history the memory of the past is preserved habitually by oral tradition." What authority has he for such a sweeping statement? It is difficult to see how he can make it in face of the fact that the Tel el-Amarna tablets, representing only a single discovery in Egypt, furnish literary matter from officers, scattered over Palestine and Syria, which amounts in bulk to that of the whole Pentateuch, and which was written shortly before the time of Moses. Indeed, the discoveries in Babylonia and Egypt are all emphasizing the importance which was set upon written documents in pre-Mosaic times. Thus, the ordinary theory, which makes Moses and his generation responsible for the Pentateuch, is receiving a support from these discoveries which many modern critics do not have either the perspicacity to perceive or the frankness to acknowledge. In light of our present information it would be out of all analogy with the habits of the time and place for the generation to which Moses belonged to have left no written records of the momentous events which they witnessed and of which they were a part.