

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 *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

“SPOKEN BY JEREMY THE PROPHET.”

AN ancient controversy, of which the traces may be found from early ages of the Christian Church down to recent times, has recently been revived amongst us by the instrumentality of a leading newspaper. I refer to the dispute over the right reading or correct interpretation of a notable passage in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. xxvii. 9) relating to the purchase of the Field of Blood by Judas the Traitor, which is said to have been foretold in ancient prophecy in the following words :

“Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying:

‘And I took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the priced one whom they priced from the children of Israel, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord enjoined upon me.’ ”

The controversy is, of course, as to how the Evangelist, supposed inerrant, could have ascribed to Jeremiah a prophecy of which the nearest parallel is in Zechariah (Zech. xi. 12), (though even in the supposed parallel the agreement between the book and its quotation is not very obvious).

The occasion of the revival of the controversy was as follows: Dr. Armitage Robinson had delivered a series of Saturday afternoon lectures in Westminster Abbey, and in trying to re-state the doctrine of inspiration, so as not to involve inerrancy, he alluded to this passage and pointed out that there had always been leading Christian teachers who had taken the liberty of disbelieving statements made in the Bible, and, having carefully ensconced himself under the wings of Origen or of Augustine, he announced from his selected shelter that St. Matthew could not have been right in referring the prophecy in question to Jeremiah.

Up to this point there was nothing very novel in the treatment of the subject; it was neither epoch-making nor

earthquake-making; it merely stated what every textual critic of any historical standing had maintained, that the right reading in the passage of Matthew was "Jeremiah," and that the generally accepted conclusion was that the first Evangelist had made an incorrect reference. There can be no doubt that both of these critical statements would commonly pass unnoticed. It was singular that they should have been so vigorously challenged, first, under the head of the text; second, under that of the deduction drawn from it. Mrs. Lewis wrote to the *Times* to point out that in her old Syriac Gospels there was no mention of any prophet at all, and that this omission on the part of a very early Eastern version was supported by early Greek and Latin evidence. And it was inferred that the blunder might be removed from the shoulders of St. Matthew and laid upon one of his earlier transcribers or editors who was not so much bound by the law of inerrancy as St. Matthew was supposed to have been. Mrs. Lewis, accordingly, solved the problem by erasing the difficulty. In this she was merely doing again what the earliest critics of the New Testament had attempted. I suspect she is unduly in love with the Inerrancy of the Bible, and perhaps, like Tischendorf, whom in many ways she resembles, is a little prejudiced in favour of evidence which she has herself brought to light. It must, however, in fairness, be stated that she did not appeal for a reversal of the verdicts of previous New Testament critics, without producing fresh evidence, and that evidence has an extraordinary weight of its own. I will not say that Tischendorf would have reversed his judgment under the new warnings from Mount Sinai, though perhaps he might have done so: we may feel sure, however, that it would not have made the slightest impression upon Dr. Hort. I only wish to point out that it does, in my own judgment, make a difference in the balancing of the evidence, to have such a heavy weight put into the scale from an unexpected quarter. And Mrs. Lewis was quite justified in

moving for a new trial, if she thought the matter had, up to the present, been, from a defect in the evidence, wrongly decided. My own view is that the text is right as it stands; a fresh reason for this opinion will come a little lower down.

Mrs. Lewis was followed by Dr. Waller, who accepted the reading "Jeremiah," and brought the Old Testament to book for having wrongly labelled a certain part of the prophecies which pass under the name of Zechariah. The credit of the New Testament was thus saved at the expense of the Old; both are inspired, this and that, but it is the other one that is wrong. We close the door upon the Higher Critics of the New Testament by throwing open the question of Authorship in the Old Testament! Desperate men choose desperate remedies!

Dr. Armitage Robinson referred to these criticisms when he published his lectures¹; he added a note, in which he stated the objections of his critical antagonists, without referring to them by name, and concluded by saying that "it is better, with Origen and Augustine, to admit the difficulty; and then we may try to learn its lesson." He did not tell us what the lesson exactly was, nor why it should take much trying to master it. It is at this point that I propose, uninvited, to come to his assistance.

It has been my habit, for some time past, to warn my students that the Christian literature does not necessarily begin with the New Testament, and certainly not with the Gospels; that there are traces of previous documentary matter from which the accepted and canonical New Testament depends; and that, until we have learnt to recognize and isolate these primitive deposits, we shall constantly be making mistakes in our interpretation of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers. And, in particular, I tell them that there are two lost documents of the early Christian propaganda, occurring in various forms, but sufficiently alike to constitute a cycle or type,

¹ *Some Thoughts on Inspiration* Longmans,

the traces of which are to be found constantly in the first period of the literature of the Church. Of these the first is the Collection of the Sayings of Jesus, the second is the Book of Testimonies from the Old Testament. The first of these underlies the Gospels, and is especially an instrument for the conversion of the Gentiles; the second is an instrument for the refutation of the Jews.

The Book of Sayings does not come before us at the present time, and I am aware that, in referring to it, I have the opposition of a number of leading scholars to the belief in its antiquity and in the possibility of the recovery of any of its very early forms. I am the less anxious to discuss the matter, as I hold it to be, in one respect, a case of *Time versus Tradition*, and that, when we have reduced our prejudices in favour of the antiquity of the Gospels to more sober limits, we shall ultimately agree well enough as to the Book of Sayings, and its antiquity and value. But the other matter is even more important and far-reaching, and it colours the whole of the early Christian Theology, as well as some of the theology in our own day which can be shown to be derived, in an unbroken line, from early disputes between Jews and Christians, in which the latter employ the Old Testament, or rather, a series of selected passages from the Old Testament, to establish the truth of the new revelation.

There has been for some time a suspicion that such a work existed. For example, the late Dr. Hatch, in his *Essays on Biblical Greek*, expresses himself as follows¹:

"It may naturally be supposed that a race which laid stress on moral progress, whose religious services had variable elements of both prayer and praise, and which was carrying on *an active propaganda*, would have, among other books, *manuals of morals*, of devotion, and *of controversy*. It may also be supposed, if we take into consideration the contemporary habit of making collections of *excerpta*, and the special authority which the Jews attached to their

¹ P. 208. The section is headed "On Composite Quotations from the Septuagint."

sacred books, that some of their manuals would consist of extracts from the Old Testament.

"The existence of composite quotations in the New Testament, and in some of the early Fathers suggests the hypothesis that we have in these relics of such manuals."

This hypothesis of Dr. Hatch has been put forward also by other writers, for the most part independently of his suggestion, and we are in a position to carry that hypothesis into demonstration by the restoration of large fragments of the manuals of which he speaks.

We notice that in Dr. Hatch's idea, such manuals are, in the first instance, a part of the natural equipment of Greek-speaking Jews, whose requirements in active propaganda led to the collection of such excerpts as would form a controversialist's *vade mecum*, based of course upon the Old Testament, by preference in its Greek form. And from the requirements of the Hellenist to those of the full-grown Christian the step is almost imperceptible.

It is to such a hypothesis, confirmed as it can easily be, by a study of apostolic and sub-apostolic literature, especially of such parts as would belong to a *Corpus Anti-Judaicum*, if such a book were to be produced (as it certainly should be produced), that I am in the habit of referring for the elucidation of recurrent textual phenomena which cannot be wholly due to manuscript variations, and for the study of the crystallization of the leading Christian doctrines.

It would be comparatively easy to show, though this is not the place to do it, that such *testimonies* as those I allude to were classified in sections with titles, brief explanations and frequent insertions of questions and comments by the controversialist editor. And it is often from the recurrence of such editorial matter, especially where the editor makes mistakes in his references to authors or in his interpretations of them, that we are able to detect the use of the Book of Testimonies and to isolate the matter which succeeding writers have borrowed

from it. But even when there is no editorial matter, the existence of centos from the Scriptures, combining passages in a set order and with substantially the same textual variations and connecting links, will often betray the use of the lost little book of which we are speaking.

It can be shown, moreover, that it was common to make a brief reference to the author of the extract given, usually under a very simple form, such as "David says in the Psalm," or "Moses says"; and sometimes only the name "David" or "Moses," or whoever it may be, is given for verification; and it need hardly be said that the Book of Testimonies was subject to all the errors that such collections commonly develop, that the names often dropped out, or were attached to the wrong passages; and it would, I think, be possible to write quite an interesting article on the traces of such transcriptional errors in the early Christian literature.

The suggestion then arises (and it will be a startling one only to those to whom the subject is altogether new) that the Gospel of Matthew has been using a Book of Testimonies, in which the history and tragic end of Judas were explained as a fulfilment of ancient prophecy, and that the mistake which has vexed so many righteous souls was not necessarily even an original one in the Gospel, but one which either existed in the Book of Testimonies, or were accidentally made by the Evangelist in using such a book. In the latter event, the matter is not original, though the erroneous use of the matter may perhaps be so described. In the former case, the mistake, if it be one, is higher up, and the text of the Evangelist must be replaced by the text of his source.

Such, in brief, is the explanation which has been in circulation privately for some time, and it is quite possible that it has been publicly made elsewhere. I should not, however, in view of the lack of direct support to the hypothesis, have drawn attention to it, if it had not been

that the requisite verification recently turned up in a Syriac writer, to whom I shall presently allude. And even in this case, I should probably have kept the verification to myself, until I was able to publish a dissertation upon the Book of Testimonies generally, if it had not been that a discussion had been going on in the public press on the subject, and it seemed hardly fair to withhold an important and perhaps a decisive piece of evidence, which is at least as weighty in such a connexion as the textual authority of Augustine or Origen.

The way in which the matter came to my notice was as follows: I had been reading a volume of unpublished writings of the great Syriac father Bar Şalibi, in which he discourses against the Mohammedans, the Jews, the Nestorians, etc.; we may call it briefly a book against "Jews, Turks and Heretics."

In reading the first of the tracts, which was written against the Moslems, I was much struck by the use which the controversialist made of arguments of an exactly similar character to those which I knew to have been employed by the early Christian fathers against the Jews, and I began to suspect that he had, either by tradition, or, which was more probable, in writing, a Syriac collection of early Christian *Testimonies against the Jews*. Certainly he must have been familiar with the primitive methods of Christian propagandism and debate. And this belief was confirmed, and I think finally established, when I came recently to read the tract of Bar Şalibi against the Jews which followed this one against the Moslems. We will show that in this tract Bar-Şalibi definitely admits that he is working off a collection of Testimonies, and we will see what he says on the subject of Judas.

The reader who is interested in the parallel between the Christian Father confuting the Jew, and the Christian bishop disputing with the Moslem, will find an exact parallel in Mrs. Gibson's Arabic tract from Mount Sinai,

which she calls *A tract on the Triune Nature of God*,¹ but which I maintain should be headed simply *Against the Moslems*. In reviewing this book in the *American Journal of Theology*² it was easy to establish the statement that "behind the writer we see the line of earlier scribes whose themes are inscribed *Contra Judaeos*: he has borrowed from them, used their methods, and incorporated their quotations," and at the close of the review it is claimed as demonstrated that there is an affinity of the tract with the earlier anti-Judaic literature, and that the Eastern Church stood towards the Moslem in much the same position that they had occupied from the beginning toward the men of the synagogue. A similar state of mind to that of the writer of the anonymous tract is betrayed by Bar Salibi. Let us now come to his actual arguments with the Jews, and see how he is in the habit of presenting his case. I am now quoting from a MS in my possession; the writer is establishing the doctrine of the Trinity and the Divine Nature of Jesus from the Scriptures; he presents his case in the following manner:

Jeremiah. And I will raise up to David a branch of righteousness.

David. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Isaiah. And he did not send an angel, but the Lord himself saved us.

Solomon, speaking as from the mouth of the Son, says, "Before the abysses I was brought forth."

Isaiah. The Lord God hath sent me, and His spirit.

Moses. Thy right hand, O Lord, hath broken in pieces the enemy. (Here the arm and the right hand of the Father is the Son.)

And so the writer goes on, coming at last to the conclusion that "all these things we have made clear from the *testimonies*."

Those who are familiar with the writings of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, etc., will at once recognize familiar friends amongst the quotations. For example, the

¹ *Studia Sinaitica*, vii.

² *Am. Journ. Theol.*, 1901, pp. 75-76.

quotation from Moses (Exod. xv. 6), with its added explanation, corresponds to the section in Cyprian's *Testimonies* (Bk. ii. 4), which is headed, "Quod Christus idem manus et brachium Dei," though the quotation itself does not appear in Cyprian. (Notice that the 'arm' has not been mentioned in the text which Bar Şalibi quotes). In the same way the editorial remark that Solomon speaks in the person of the Son, will be found in the *Testimonies* against the Jews ascribed to Gregory of Nyssa in the form: "Speaking in the person of Wisdom," *that is, of the Son* [he said], "When he was preparing the heaven, I was by him." The passage from Isaiah lxiii. 9 is a well-known Christological argument, employed by Irenaeus (III. xxii. 1), Cyprian (*Testimonies*, ii. 7) and elsewhere. And so we might accumulate a mass of references in confirmation of our statement that Bar Şalibi is here using not only the method of *Testimonies* against the Jews, but an actual collection. The minute agreements between himself and early Christian fathers and centoists can hardly be explained in any other way.

A little lower down he comes to testimonies on the Passion and the Betrayal, and proceeds as follows:

Am. (v. 12): Concerning Judas who betrayed Him, Amos prophesied, the oppressor of the righteous has taken a bribe.

Zech. (xii. 12): and Zechariah; If it be pleasing in your eyes, give me my price; and if not, you defraud me: and they weighed me thirty pieces of silver, and I took the thirty pieces of silver and cast them into the treasury.

And Jeremiah said: And they gave me the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the valued one, whom they valued from the sons of Israel, and I gave them for the potter's field.

Isa. (iii. 10): And Isaiah said: Woe to the wicked: because the evil of the work of their hands shall be recompensed.

Ps. lxxviii. 27, and David: Command evil upon him, etc. And *Ps.* cix. 8: And his dwellings and his ministry let another take.

Prov. (vi. 12, 13): And Solomon says: A foolish person: a wicked man walks in slander: and he makes signs with his eyes and strikes with his fist.

Deut. (xxvii. 25): And Moses says: Cursed is every one that taketh a bribe to kill the soul of the righteous.

Here then we have Bar Ṣalibi's testimonies concerning Judas, and I think there will be little difficulty in conceding that they represent an older student than Bar Ṣalibi himself. The text of the Testimonies follows closely the text of the Peshito, the sentence quoted from Jeremiah being a transcript from the Gospel of Matthew in that version. It does not, however, follow that it was originally taken from Matthew, for in the Syriac versions the name of the prophet is wanting. The structure of Bar Ṣalibi's work implies, as we have shown above, a collection of written testimonies in Greek, and it is quite natural that Bar Ṣalibi, or his sources, should give the well-known Syriac equivalents for them. One of the most interesting confirmations of the antiquity of the Book of Testimonies in Syriac, will arise from the fact that it was clearly known to the author of the Doctrine of Addai. He represents Addai as using the method of Testimonies for the conversion of the people of Edessa, and actually gives the quotation from Isaiah xlvi. 16, which we have alluded to above, in the following form :

"Also the prophets of old spake thus: that 'the Lord our God and His Spirit hath sent us.' And if I speak anything which is not written in the prophets, the Jews, who are standing among you and hear me, will not receive it."¹

Here then we come upon the suggestion that there existed a primitive collection of Testimonies, which has been used in its Greek form by St. Matthew, and in its Syriac form by Bar Ṣalibi. And the error of St. Matthew, if it be an error, is due to his use of the Book of Testimonies. At this point the result of the investigation is somewhat different from what I expected. I was on the look out for evidence to show that the ascription to Jeremiah was one of those cases of which the *Testimonies*

¹ Cf. Acts xxvi. 22, 23, where the heading of a section of Testimonies is in the text.

furnish frequent instances where a title has been misplaced; that is to say, I thought that the title, Zechariah, had slipped, or had been displaced by the title of a neighbouring testimony from Jeremiah. That would be a very easy solution to the whole difficulty; but it appears to be too simple; for (1) the evidence has increased for writing Jeremiah, not only in Matthew, where it certainly belongs, but in the previous document. (2) The title of Zechariah has not been displaced, for both Zechariah and Jeremiah are there. (3) There appears to be no other Jeremiah passage in the neighbourhood from which the title can have come. Moreover when we examine the text of the prophecy-loving Matthew, on the hypothesis that he is using a collection of Testimonies, we find that in Matthew xxvii. 16 (*οἱ δὲ ἔστῃσαν αὐτῷ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια*) there is a distinct trace of Zechariah xi. 12, as in Bar Ṣalibi's extract, without *τὸν μισθὸν μου*. So that it really seems as if Matthew had used from his little text-book, first a sentence from Zechariah, and second, one from Jeremiah (or if you prefer it, Pseudo-Jeremiah).

My suggestion, then, is that the printed Greek text of Matthew is correct, but that it depends upon a lost collection of Testimonies, and it is no longer as obvious as it has sometimes been assumed to be, that the reference to Jeremiah ought to be explained away by the interpreter, where the textual critic has insisted on retaining it.

Beyond this we do not see our way very clearly; we have, however, gained a point, and, as Dr. Robinson would say, "we must try and learn the lesson."

One part of the lesson would appear to be that the Book of Testimonies is older than much of the New Testament literature; whether we ought also to say that the Gospel of Matthew is later than has been commonly supposed is an interesting question which also requires more time and further deliberation.

J. RENDEL HARRIS.