

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 Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. III.—RECENT CRITICISM ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY.

IT will be well to realize at the outset that the inquiry as to the relation of the book of Deuteronomy to the preceding books of the Pentateuch is only on the fringe of the great question now being forced upon the Church—whether almost the whole of the O.T. is to begin with shame to take a lower room than that which it has hitherto been supposed to occupy. And it is well to realize at the outset that the position hitherto occupied by the O.T. is that which has been accepted in every age of the Church, and that it has the express, reiterated, and varied *imprimatur* of the writers of the N.T. and of our Lord Himself.

The O.T. writings are consistently and continually forced into prominence; and that, not only in dealing with Jews (as if it had been an *argumentum ad hominem*), but with Gentiles. The dispersion of the Jews, the prevalence of the Greek tongue, and the existence of the LXX. translation were three co-ordinate events which made the appeal to the O.T. possible. But the appeal was more than possible. It was, as I have said, prominent and emphatic; and those were counted noblest who tested the New by the Old.

In view of this, it seems to me that the Christian student, as such, cannot have a free hand. He must start with just so much prejudice as the facts to which I have already referred create. His doing so is the purest reason, "the truest truth." Just as the astronomer starting with a settled conviction of the truth of Kepler's laws, would be thereby fitted to interpret the newly observed facts as to the perturbations in the orbit of Uranus, and to become the discoverer of Neptune, so the Christian student who sets out from a basis of established Christian premisses may prove the best interpreter of such new facts as can be established by a more rigid criticism.

One other preliminary remark may be allowed us. The great question before us is not one simply of the lexicon and of the grammar. The historical instinct, the practical instinct, and, above all, the spiritual instinct, must assert their place on the bench of judicature. It is, therefore, no presumption if the Church declines to accept as final the judgment of the Hebraists, greatly as she ought to value their co-operation, at least as assessors.

I. *The Structure*.¹—The structure of the Book of Deuteronomy

¹ I need hardly say that all that can be attempted in a paper like the present is to suggest a line of inquiry which might very profitably be extended in several directions.

is perfectly intelligible, and, in its broad features, easy to discern. But when we look at it more closely it is found to appear complex, extremely broken, interspersed with notes, laden with repetitions, and embracing within its compass, first, a collection of statutes, and then two widely differing lyrical compositions, which, however, answer in a remarkable way to the two pictures of blessing and of cursing which are everywhere presented side by side in the addresses which form the main feature of the book. And it seems to me in the highest degree improbable that any writer in a later age, and having in view an ethical purpose, should have brought out such a piece of work. He would either have disencumbered his pages of a great deal of the subsidiary matter, or he would have taken care to weld it together at the points of juncture into a more artistic whole.

As an illustration of this I might give chap. xxxi. The narrative intermingles the summons of Moses to the Tabernacle, the charge to Joshua, the address to the people, the provision for the periodical reading of the law, and for its preservation. It is not difficult to disentangle the thread of the story, nor is it difficult to account for its form. It is not everyone who can give a narrative precisely and completely in the order of events. It is easier and more common, especially if the writing be slow, or the writer interrupted, to put things down in the order in which they present themselves to the recollection. This is the secret of the breaks, and of the repetitions with additions and in different forms, of which so much has been made. It is a style, too, which is not without certain advantages as an aid to memory and a stimulus to study. But that any writer, drawing on his imagination, or digesting and compiling a narrative from a comparison of different documents, should give us such a resultant appears to me out of the question.

But to return to the consideration of the structure of the book at large. If the book is really historical, the story of its composition is easily accounted for, and may be conceived of thus. It can be shown that the histories as they stand allow thirty days for the events described between Deut. i. 1, and xxxiii. end. This will be seen from the following scheme :

	<i>Year.</i>	<i>Mo.</i>	<i>Day (of the Exodus).</i>	
The Jordan was crossed in the	- 41st	1st	10th	Josh. iv. 19.
The addresses began in the	- 40th	11th	1st	Deut. i. 1-5.
The interval between being	-	2	9	Deut. xxxiv. 8.
Leaving for the addresses				
previously, and for events				
narrated in Josh. i. 1 to				
iv. 19, subsequently -	-	1	9	

Nine days is perhaps sufficient for the events last referred to, and this gives 30 days for the addresses, etc., Deut. i.—xxxiii.

We may suppose that the addresses, which form, as I have said, the chief features of the book, were delivered at intervals during those thirty days, and were reported, more or less fully, by various Scribes; that meantime, perhaps on several occasions, the statutes deemed at the time most needful were selected, revised, supplemented, and read with running comments; and that the different contributions were put together without much attempt to join them into one. We then shall have a working hypothesis, which will be found, I think, to be very helpful to the comprehensive understanding of the book. The historical setting, the insertion of the Song and of the Blessing, which constitute the poetical presentation of the obverse sides of the teaching of all the addresses, would be added without delay; and subsequent times would supply historical and topographical notes, and such modernizing of the language as might be deemed desirable.

II. *The Style of Thought.* — Nothing could exceed the intensity and the great solemnity which pervades all the addresses, shorter or longer (twelve in number). They give one the impression of perfect sincerity and profound conviction. They tell of an almost awful realization of the holiness of God, and of the burning jealousy of His love toward His people. The speaker's own feelings are steeped in uncompromising loyalty to his Master, and are equally full of yearning affection and most tender solicitude for the people committed to his care. Everywhere we see hatred of evil, ardent affection, fearless courage, complete self-devotion. Everywhere it is the true Moses of the Exodus. It is perfectly true that in Deuteronomy we have left behind the anthropomorphism of the greater part of Genesis. That anthropomorphism was perhaps only an indication that it was true, of the world's childhood, at all events, that

Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy.

But Moses had not been trained in Egypt for nothing, had not failed to learn much during those forty years of mountain solitude, which culminated in the lesson, "Draw not nigh hither." It has been said, indeed, that the Moses of Exodus iii. and iv. could not be identified with the bold and eloquent orator of Deuteronomy. But if seven times six days could transform the Denier of Christ into the Apostle of the Pentecost, could not close on seven times six years—years which had witnessed the Exodus, had given the experience of the wanderings, and had given to two and a half tribes their inheritance—open the prophet's mouth in a degree of

which he could not himself have conceived on the threshold of his work? The magnificence of the words is exactly matched with the greatness of the occasion. They are just the words that a man like Moses, moved of the Holy Ghost, might at such a time, and amid such surroundings, have spoken. But that a man of such a moral calibre as to be capable of impersonating Moses—and that with such artful and elaborate disguise—should also have been capable of utterances such as these, utterances which stamped their impress on the whole nation for ages, utterances of which in a special manner our Lord Himself made such frequent use, appears to me incredible.

III. *The Moral and Religious Teaching.*—When we come to examine the contents of the book we find that its moral and religious teaching are not those which would have seemed most necessary in the days of Josiah. Of course, if written in those late times it would not be as a work of art, but to meet the ethical wants of the age. It was a time when the oppression of brethren, the tyranny, the covetousness, the luxuriousness, and licentiousness of the upper classes, and the idolatrous abominations and religious pride of the whole community called forth the sorrowful rebukes of Jeremiah, and later on of Ezekiel. But the writer of Deuteronomy has in his eye absolutely *no present evils*. Of course, such evils existed. But the prophet is dealing with the Future. And in that Future only one thing fills in the shadow. And that one thing is *Israel's apostasy from Jehovah*. With a view to this he recalls their waywardness in the past. He adjures them not to fall into the ways of the heathen round about them; he warns them of the hardness of their own hearts, and the terrible evils that would come from forgetfulness and stubbornness. On the one hand, he exhorts them to steadfastness, joyful worship, free-hearted and open-handed liberality, and brotherly kindness. But there is no call to repentance, no *vox clamantis* summoning them to a religious, or any other, reformation. The only approach to anything of the kind is a most remarkable, because most gentle and most loving, witness that if Israel in *the dark days of captivity and dispersion* would seek again to the Lord, He would hear their cry (iv.). The teaching of the book belongs to the whole history of Israel, but it is teaching that could only have been delivered on the threshold of that history.

IV. And the *grounds* on which this teaching is made to rest are as applicable to the time to which tradition assigns the book as are the chief points of moral and religious teaching. The innumerable but brief and scattered allusions to the precise position of the nation now on the banks of the Jordan

are so interwoven with the whole tenour of the discourses that only the highest literary art could have produced such a result, and the result of the pains taken would have been appreciated in no other age. The past, with all its varied and wondrous experiences of mercy and of chastening, of deliverance and of suffering, is the ground-colour spread over the whole canvas. And the future, far and near, is painted with that variation of "clear and obscure," which renders the perspective so admirable. Especially it will not fail to be observed that where the writer touches upon the past it is always with the definiteness belonging to near and clearly recollected historic facts, known to his audience nearly or quite as well as to himself; while if he speaks of the future, it is always in language which betrays apprehension or hope, but, (unless we must except the vivid picturing of sicknesses and sufferings), never slipping into the expressions of a man who was actually, though not professedly, writing history.¹

V. *The Choice and the Conduct of the King.*—The famous passage (chap. xvii.) about (1) the choice and (2) the conduct of the king, gives us an opportunity of observing how easily and how certainly a dramatist would have fallen into the pitfall of forgetting the *rôle* he was playing.

First as to the choice of a king from among their brethren. It was perfectly natural for Moses, from all his experience of the people and of their disposition, from all his prescience of the dangers they would encounter, to apprehend as *possible*, and all too *probable*, that they might one day put themselves under the protectorate of some sovereign of the future. History never realized his fears in this case, and no writer in after years would ever have dreamt of attributing such an idea to Israel's lawgiver. But it was still more natural for Moses, intimately acquainted with the great armies of Egypt, and knowing as we do to-day that other powerful nations, such as the Hittites, would now be Israel's no very distant neighbours, should express a fear lest Israel's sovereign should be tempted in the coming years to seek aid from Egypt; or lest, in advancing greatness, they should attempt to imitate and rival the warlike ambition or the luxurious effeminacy which Moses had so long witnessed in the great empire of the Nile.

What would be remarkable, and is, indeed, incredible, is, not that one of the apprehensions so expressed by Moses was realized in history, but the idea that a dramatist of later days

¹ A writer in after ages would have been definite in portraying the imagined future; indistinct and vague in the historical allusions to the to him, distant past. In Deuteronomy it is precisely the reverse.

should have put either of these apprehensions in the mouth of Moses, with no object whatever to be gained by either of them.

VI. *Details.*—There are a multitude of details scattered over the book which all point to its genuine historical character, and I will submit four of these by way of specimens.

1. The references to the Divine sentence by which Moses was excluded from the promised land are so frequent, so scattered, so touching, so evidently welling up out of the depths of a mighty grief, constantly breaking through and interrupting the overlying strata of thought, that it seems to me that no art could counterfeit it (i. 27, iii. 23, and iv. 21, 22, xxxi. 2). And the effort and labour would have been absolutely in vain. Connected with this display of feeling I may call attention to the glowing description of the land, the brilliant colouring with which the future is depicted, the animated and animating reiteration of the thought that they were this day going in to possess the land. Who could have so described the past experiences of Israel in the days of Manasseh or of Josiah?

2. The second point to which I refer is the selection of Ebal and Gerizim as the mountains on which the Cursing and the Blessing were to be pronounced, and at the foot of which an altar was to be erected, and the Torah inscribed. I cannot here point out how meaningless would be the geographical description of the position of these mountains (unless we are to regard it as intended to be part of a literary blind) for a people familiar with their own country; but I ask, is it possible to conceive that the writer of a fiction in the days and at the court of Josiah, should have deliberately, and without any object to be attained, placed such a mark of honour and distinction on the locality referred to? Why, Ebal and Gerizim were in the very centre of the revolted tribes (already banished it might be thought for their schism), on the very highroad halfway between Samaria and Bethel! Beyond all question, such a writer would have considered himself at liberty to draw a veil over a point so manifestly opposed to all the prejudices of his people and to the only object he could have in view, even if he had found in it the materials he was working upon.

3. I might express my surprise that no hint is found in the book of that great schism just referred to, which had rent Israel in twain. For how could a follower of Josiah, engaged in writing a religious novel, have kept silence on such a point, when such an opportunity was in his hand? But I must ask how it was that while Ebal and Gerizim were to have the distinction of being pointed out as the locality near which a temporary altar was to be erected, the writer kept absolute silence as to Mount Zion, and spoke as if he only saw in dim

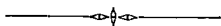
and nameless distance "the place which the Lord our God would choose to put (or to cause to dwell) His Name there." If he could name Gerizim for a temporary altar, how could he resist the temptation to name, or to give some hint of Jerusalem? The expression referred to occurs some twenty-five times. If the book is historical, all is comprehensible, and other passages (from Josh. ix. 27 onwards) are not only intelligible, but some of them forcible to a degree. But if we are not reading history, but fiction, there was abundant reason for giving the name, or at least some indication of the place, but absolutely no reason for silence. And not only are a score of passages in Joshua, Kings, Chronicles, the Psalms, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah, rendered meaningless, but the great words of our Lord, which had their roots in those old teachings,—"Wherever two or three are met together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them,"¹ are evacuated of half their force.

4. One more point only. It is that, in the blessing of Moses (chap. xxxiii.), the most extensive, the most fervent, the most splendid forecast is pronounced upon the house of Joseph. If this is history, all is consistent and comprehensible. Joseph took an oath of his brothers that they would carry up his bones into Canaan. In Exod. xiii. and Josh. xxiv. it is related that they fulfilled his request. Let us read Deut. xxxiii. in the light of this fact. First of all, we seem to watch the heads of the tribes passing before Moses in processional order at that last interview before he went up into the mountain to die. Then we hear him address to each in turn some brief word of parting blessing. At length, as they march past in due course, we see the chiefs of Ephraim and Manasseh. They are carrying the splendid chest, painted with hieroglyphics, which contains the embalmed remains of their great ancestor, the saviour of Egypt, the saviour of his own family and race. And we mark how the soul of the great prophet is stirred within him at the sight. We, too, gaze, but we cannot wonder when we hear him pour forth blessing upon blessing, as if he knew not when to stop, upon him who was once *separate from his brethren*. This is easy to realize, not difficult to believe. But that a writer in the kingdom of Judah, whether in the days of the wicked Manasseh, or of the good Josiah, or at any other time, should have gratuitously imagined, or have gratuitously imported into his fiction, such a reversal of all the ideas of his own people, and have lifted up the house of Joseph on such a pedestal of exaltation, is one of those points which seem to me historically incredible.

¹ Compare St. Matt. xviii. 20 and St. John iv. 21.

I have endeavoured to show that the structure, the style of thought, the moral and religious teaching, the grounds of appeal, and many details—of which I have noticed four—point to the genuine character and historical reality of Deuteronomy. But I must close; and, in conclusion, I should like to make an appeal to those who are pressing these questions upon us. My appeal is that they should complete their new Eddystone before they take the old one down. I will assume, for the moment, that their analysis is all correct: that "E." and "J." and "J. E." and "P. C." and "D.," etc., are to take the place of Genesis, Exodus, etc. Well, the chemist has great power; he can take a loaf of wholesome bread and put its contents before us in so many phials, starch, and gluten, and water, and what not. But let a man be ever so hungry, he will scarcely eat these elementary substances. Nor would they readily digest if he did. And the chemist who analyzed the loaf cannot re-make it. The elements are there, indeed, a scientific curiosity, but absolutely useless.

ALFRED KENNION.



ART. IV.—NOTES AND COMMENTS ON JOHN XX.

No. VIII.

WE began last month to study the narrative of the doubt and the faith of Thomas, and remarked the strong individuality of the Apostle's character as it is indicated by St. John. It is from St. John only that we get any such information about the man; the other Evangelists and the Acts contain mere mentions of his name. In St. John it occurs seven times, and in three cases it is given with the translation, *Didymus*, *Twin*. Is it possible that the Evangelist sees a moral significance in the name, as if it suggested a certain doubleness in the mind where love and mistrust were both at once so strong? Not that duplicity in any other sense is traceable in Thomas; his was anything but a character of guile.

In two other scenes in this Gospel, as we remember, Thomas appears, so to speak, in character. In xi. 16 he proposes to the others to accompany the Lord into Judea at a dangerous time: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him;" a brief sentence, in which we see combined a resolution almost petulant, an intense devotion to his Lord's person, *and* great mistakes as to His nature and power. In xiv. 5 he seems to interrupt the Master in the midst of His words about the heavenly home and His purpose to "go and prepare" it for