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WHY DISSECT ZECHARIAH?

I

HALF the trouble with many of the attempts to answer this sort of question is that the foundations of inquiry are altogether too narrow and shallow. We need to go far back and to look all round before we attempt to put Zechariah and his fellow prophets under the microscope.

Anything like detailed examination of texts and paragraphs is not thought of in the compass of a paper like this, the object of which is rather to show how vicious is the system by which modern criticism has often approached, and still approaches, the analysis and dating of the almost tiny fragments which are all that is left to us of such prophets as Nahum, Zephaniah or Joel, and even of slightly longer remnants like Hosea or Zechariah. While to some insistence on such first principles may seem to savour of platitude, they are in practice so constantly ignored that even the most conservative Bible student has to be on his guard if, in the face of so many commanding names and so much calm assurance in the working out of temporarily attractive theories, he is not to lose some of his grip on first things—the things which in every other field of criticism are unquestioningly reckoned the first.

The reason for this curious tendency of scholastic argumentation to stray from the high roads of sound criticism is, for the orthodox, a very satisfactory one. It is neither more nor less than the supremacy of the Book of Books. The Bible is studied unfairly, as well as fairly, simply because it is supreme and unique.

It is with perfect justice that Christian apologists insist that one of the strongest testimonies to the Divine origin of the Bible is the constant, intense and meticulous study which it continues to attract among friends and foes alike. Here is a collection of books cradled in a race of which the national existence was finally extinguished eighteen centuries ago,

preserving both the right and the power to dictate a supreme rule of life to hundreds of millions of the human race and, yet further, recognized everywhere by followers of other religions, by unbelievers of every kind and by the heterogeneous hangers-on of various religions, Christianity itself included, who like to appear impartial and uncommitted, as the most vital and potent collection of its kind in the world, which, whether they like it or not, can never be philosophically discounted as a living influence on human thought and life and *must* be taken seriously by anyone who claims to be an intelligent and honest student of mankind. It has been attacked, derided and—so they are pleased to think—discredited by the unbelievers of eighteen centuries ; yet it lives, and its power and challenge are as great as ever. This unique concentration of spiritual and intellectual study upon the Bible has, at times, led its friends, as well as its foes into extravagance, and the very ardour of belief in plenary inspiration has issued, now and again, in subtleties of interpretation and in exaggerated emphasis which end by doing harm rather than good. In the opposite camp the same tendency is constantly at work perverting the most massive and acute scholarship in a way that would bring ridicule upon any reasoner in the ordinary matters of human business and everyday life.

We find, in our own Authorised Version, fourteen letters attributed to St. Paul. These—let us take the genuineness of all for granted—cover a period of about fifteen years. In 2 Corinthians xi. 28, Paul speaks of “that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the Churches”—a burden which could only increase during the last eight or ten years of his life. We may reasonably conclude that the number of substantial letters written in the last fifteen years of his life was nearer fourteen hundred than fourteen.

Further : we have ample evidence in the N.T., from Acts onwards, that diversities of usage and great diversity of problems existed in different churches. I am not quite clear that Canon Streeter, in *The Primitive Church*, always gives, when he is dealing with questions of authorship, full weight to this fact, upon which he lays the very greatest stress in seeking to establish the thesis that in the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages ecclesiastical order and usage were still in a very fluid condition. Young religious communities are *ipso facto* wayward ; racial tempera-

ment, personal influences, political and cultural traditions, and even mere accidents, affect them directly, swiftly, perhaps permanently.

Giving all the weight we may to the fact that out of all St. Paul's epistolary efforts, the Holy Spirit has retained for the Church's guidance only fourteen, at the very outside, of these letters, and that those thus chosen must therefore be regarded as peculiarly significant, are we anything but utterly foolish if we allow ourselves to attribute decisive importance to *ἀπαξ λεγόμενα*, to variations in address and style, to indications of variation in doctrine or ecclesiastical theory quite probably dependent on local events and thought? Our utter ignorance of a thousand data intimately affecting Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Timothy, Titus and other Churches or individuals, makes it surely far safer for us to argue that this or that apparent minor incongruity may be due to circumstances and developments of which we know *nothing*, than boldly to conclude that here we have evidence of dual or multiple authorship and of other than the traditional date.

II

Before we apply this caution to the criticism of the Old Testament, we may consider another problem raised by the decisions of the disintegrators.

The Hellenistic era, both in Egypt and in Palestine, was not an age of ignorance. Literary blunders which might—one may suppose—occur in the times of the Judges can hardly be ascribed to the Biblical experts of the centuries that followed the Return. The hard fact that Isaiah and Zechariah have each come down to posterity as a whole book requires a far more serious explanation than some critics allow.

The theory that Isaiah xl-end was a separate unity, tacked on to the first thirty-nine chapters on account of a strongly marked similarity of style and tone has something to commend it. The fact that other chapters quite as obviously—so we are told—post-exilic, like xiii and xiv, are found jammed in among chapters of admittedly far earlier date entirely lacks this semblance of verisimilitude. Yet there they are!

The last six chapters of Zechariah are, it may readily be admitted by the strongest traditionalist, very different from the

earlier part of the book. The greater the emphasis laid on this difference, the more acute becomes the difficulty of answering the question : How came the devout scholarship of fourth or third century Judaism to perpetrate the arrant folly of tacking on to Zechariah i-viii a section which people of their own day must have been able to see—if the truth is really that way—*far more clearly than modern readers*, could not possibly have come from the pen of the original Zechariah? Yet so they did !

Conclusions based on comparisons with contemporaries—certain or uncertain—are, in the case of the Prophets, exceedingly dangerous. In the case of Zechariah, we are asked, naturally, to compare or contrast him with Haggai. One conclusion, and one only, is safe : that on *this one given subject* of the restoration of the Temple, these two spokesmen of the Divine will expressed themselves in diverse modes. But, after all, what do we know about Haggai? Simply that in the course of a few months he uttered certain inspired exhortations about equal in bulk, let us say, to the *Carmen Saeculare* of Horace. And of Horace what should we really know if the *Carmen* were all that survived of his works? Who would dream of crediting him with the Satires or Epistles? Who would think of an Aeneid if all that we possessed of Virgil were *Moretum* or *Culex*? Is there the very slightest reason why Haggai, Zephaniah, Nahum or others should not have spoken and written much that does not survive? Humanly speaking, the probability is all the other way. There is every normal possibility that such men said and wrote much that has not survived, including, perhaps, efforts which surpassed the brief survivals of their utterance in what we call literary merit. The very meagreness of these survivals, from men who certainly made a deep mark on the thought of their generation, squares with the orthodox belief that, whether they said and wrote little or much, the Spirit of God had permanent use only for these fragments.

To compare such tiny remnants under the microscope, and to draw from the comparison exact conclusions of great scope, betokens surrender to a spirit of licence which would be treated as ridiculous in any other field of literary criticism.

When one adds to this the fact that the background of Restoration writers is one of the very vaguest in Jewish history, we may encourage ourselves still further in the belief that the

problems we encounter in Zechariah ix–xiv do *not* forbid us to view with tolerance the judgment of those who, in happy ignorance of the scepticism to be meted out to them in an age removed by 2,000 years from their own, dared to associate these chapters with the name which is allowed to claim cc. i–viii. In other words, let us take our stand upon the conviction that the circulation of these two parts of our Zechariah as one book, whenever it won its way, was the outcome of a definite and abiding tradition that, however different in matters, manner and date, they were the work of one man.

Nor need we tell ourselves that anything really approaching simplification is attained by bisecting, trisecting or still further subdividing the book. One has only to glance at the welter of conjecture expended on the identification of the “three shepherds” (xi. 8) to recognize that critical experiment may give more entertainment to the speculator than enlightenment to the student.

III

From this allusion we pass easily to a general examination of the phenomena which have led scholars to deny the unity of the book.

There is, first and foremost, the very marked difference in the style and tone of the two parts. This far from conclusive argument will be noticed later. Then there is much in cc. ix–xi which is said to recall a pre-exilic date; while equally the matter of xii–xiv is thought to savour of an age altogether later than that of the early Restoration period, some bringing portions down even to the Maccabean era. Practically all of the critical school agree that ix. 13, though, it occurs in the section considered possibly pre-exilic, betokens a date subsequent to the conquests of Alexander the Great.

From this tangle Woods and Powell (*The Hebrew Prophets*, vol. iv) educe three possibilities, as follows:—

1. The chapters ix–xiv are a collection of heterogeneous oracles of divers dates, patched together by a late writer.
2. A late writer has incorporated older prophecies—we may compare the question raised by Isaiah ii. 1–3 and Micah iv. 1–3—with work of his own.
3. A late writer “has intentionally imitated older writers and adopted their terms of expression with, in some cases, different meanings: e.g. using the name, Assyria, to designate Israel’s present oppressors; Ephraim, for Jews scattered abroad”, etc.

It is significant that Woods and Powell find none of these solutions convincing, and conclude that "On a question of such great difficulty, and not after all of very great importance, it is perhaps best to maintain a spirit of healthy agnosticism."

Allowing oneself to ask, in passing, why a spirit of agnosticism is healthy, and whether a matter that has so vehemently exercised the ingenuity of scholars can honestly be consigned to the limbo of things that are "not after all of very great importance", may one not see in this conclusion an implicit confession that destructive criticism has hopelessly failed to produce anything really plausible?

Let us glance briefly at the three solutions, taking the last first. Its very ingenuity smacks strongly of a *pis aller*. When one is driven to propose an entirely imaginary fiction-merchant, one of the first demands one makes of "artificial repristination"—to quote from Wellhausen—is fidelity to background and detail. Can we with confidence accept a "repristinator", who, trying to botch up a farrago of oracles which may be attached to the name of Zechariah, chooses, as a pseudonym for the Seleucids (or other late oppressors), a name which is not once used by the true Zechariah and was calculated, like other disguises of the sort, only to mystify readers?

Another objection, which lies equally against the other two hypotheses, is that a collection of oracles bearing recognizably upon a date not earlier than about 300 B.C. cannot very happily be tacked on to a book already known, belonging to an age at least two centuries earlier and dealing expressly with events falling within a very few years of that epoch. And this incongruity would be the greater if it also appeared to many that some of the allusions suggested a pre-exilic background.

And at this point we may register the argument deemed by all disintegrators alike fatal to the unity of the book—the passage ix. 13-15, which turns upon the words: "I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece (Javan)." No one will pretend that such a passage is likely to be pre-exilic. Some commentators try to square it with their theories by assuming corruption of the text.

Where the utmost ingenuity of many scholars fails to evolve any hypothesis which satisfies the judgment even of sober dissentients from the idea that the book can be a unity, can we find any general argument for maintaining the traditional

view and, admitting freely our ignorance of a great deal in a little known period, prefer it as a starting-point for exegesis to a multitude of modern theories each more unsatisfactory than the last ?

Let us start by setting down a few dates.

The prophecies of Zechariah i–viii are expressly confined to the period between the eighth month in the second year of Darius to the ninth month in his fourth year : i.e. within the years 519 and 518 B.C.

This Darius, the first of his name, and known to history as D. Hystaspis, reigned from 522 to 485 B.C. He was succeeded by Xerxes, the Ahasuerus of Esther, who reigned till 465 B.C.

In 500 B.C. the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea was under the dominion of Persia, as the result of the conquest of the Lydian Empire by Cyrus in 546. In 499 the Ionians, i.e. the Greeks of the islands and coast cities of the eastern Aegean, revolted against Persia, and in 497 the Athenians joined the Ionians in attacking and burning Sardis. The Ionic revolt was suppressed in 494, and Darius determined without fail to punish the interfering Athenians. The result was the Persian invasion of Greece which was checked by the glorious Athenian victory of Marathon in 490. Persian reprisals were held up by the death of Darius and the revolt of Egypt against Persian rule. This having been quelled in 483, Xerxes turned his attention to Greece. In 480 a huge Persian army invaded that country *via* the Hellespont, and a mighty fleet threatened the coasts of Greece. The famous fight at Thermopylae failed to stop the Persian army, but the fleet was overthrown and destroyed at Salamis. In the following year, the Persian land forces were decisively defeated at Plataea, and the Greeks, assuming the attack, inflicted on the Persians a disastrous defeat round Mycale in the S.W. of Asia Minor. Eleven years later, another victory at the mouth of the Eurymedon, still further E., assured the freedom of Greece.

IV

Now, if conjecture be permitted to us even half as liberally as scores of critics employ it, we may fairly say that, if Zechariah was a young man in 519 B.C.—be it observed, that other Hebrew prophets manifestly began to prophesy at an early age—there is nothing whatever to make it unlikely that he was alive in

480, 470 or even 468—the year of Eurymedon. How would a patriotic Jew view the defeats of Persia and the advance of Greece?

Unquestionably, with hostility and apprehension.

For this there are two distinct reasons, both weighty. In the first place, the Jews were vassals of Persia, and very loyal vassals, for which they had good cause. In exact opposition to Babylon, Persia had restored to them their national heritage and had given the Return political and material encouragement of the most benignant kind. When the work of rebuilding was stayed by hostile intrigue, the appeal of the Jews to the new king, Darius Hystaspis, was received and considered in a businesslike spirit, and Persia again became the benefactor of Jewry. Later, the appeal of Nehemiah was generously treated; and, though this belongs to a date that could hardly fall within Zechariah's lifetime, it indicates that the policy of Persia towards Jerusalem was continuous and calculated to make the Jew feel that his suzerain was uncommonly considerate as overlords go and entitled to all the loyalty that a well treated vassal could give. To such a community, external danger to Persia was danger to Zion; Javan could only be thought of as a foe.

This by itself may be felt to provide hardly enough in the way of spiritual background for an oracle like Zechariah ix. 13-15; without more of this backing the oracle might seem little more than an attempt to borrow divine sanction for political bias. There is plenty of room for suspecting a deeper antagonism.

Contact between Assyria and Greece is proved by monumental evidence as far back as 722 B.C. There is similar evidence to prove contact between Greece and Babylonia in the second half of the seventh century, including such matters as musical instruments. This contact was with the most sensuous and least virile part of the Hellenic world—Ionia. Cyprus,¹ notably in the century with which we are specially concerned—let us say, 580 to 480—may very easily have served as an *entrepôt* for the passing on to the East of the most sensuous elements of Greek religion. The natural aloofness of Jews in the Captivity towards all non-Hebrew religious ideas must at all times have stimulated their vigilance and made them keenly observant of all the temptations that their heathen surroundings held in store. The Greek elements in this heterogeneous assemblage

¹ See Hogarth, *Ionia and the East*.

would not escape their notice. To them the soft airs of Terpander's harp, inviting worshippers to welcome the seductions of the Idalian Queen, would be as hateful as the massed music that called them to bow down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the King had set up. Less ubiquitous and domineering, this subtle suasion; but all the same recognizable—perhaps in subservience to grosser Babylonian usage—and, in the eyes of those whose spirits had learned for all time from their national ruin the lesson of Monotheism, all the more dangerous because of its wooing subtlety and grace.

The lesson that Hellenism might thereafter prove to the Hebrew race a danger fully as great as the seductions of Baal, Ashtaroth and Marduk may well have been one of the side-lines of Israel's penance in the Exile. Such preparation would not be wasted in the day when the well hardened Monotheism of the Jew had to face the allurements of Hellenic religion and culture backed by political power that easily lent itself to persecution.

It is profoundly important to notice in the New Testament the contrast between the comparative friendliness towards Rome and the keen sense of danger apprehended from Hellenism. It is popular among scholars to-day to speak of Hellenism and Judaism as virtually allies of equal value in the evolution and dissemination of the Gospel.¹ The immense value of the Greek language to Christianity no one need question, and the suppling of Jewish narrowness, both dogmatic and racial, was also, we may safely say, a divinely arranged contribution to the mediation of the Evangel to the non-Jewish world. But against the Greek spirit the N.T. is in strong opposition. "The Greeks seek after wisdom," writes Paul, immediately proceeding to show that this search is pursued on definitely wrong lines. Light-foot, commenting on Philippians iv. 8, says with regard to the word "virtue", "St. Paul seems studiously to avoid this common heathen term for moral excellence, for it occurs in this passage only"—i.e. of St. Paul's speeches and writings. It is extremely interesting to observe how St. Paul, himself fully trained in Rabbinic lore and subtlety and being naturally disposed, as a Pharisee, to resent Roman dominion, yet, when converted, recognizes in Roman mentality, with its love of order and discipline and its habit of taking facts and situations as they came

¹ See Box, *Judaism in the Greek Period* (*passim*).

and dealing with them according to their various merits, something potentially congenial to the Christian Gospel. In "the glory that was Greece", on the other hand, he finds little or nothing with which alliance is desirable. He seems to have attempted some *via media* with the Greek mind at Athens, and with very scant success; taught by this, he falls back, for the almost more formidable problem of Corinth, on "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified", and fruit is abundant.

Rome herself had found Greek influence deleterious; and what the businesslike Roman had discovered, St. Paul, the master Christian, saw even more clearly. The Greek mind moved along the paths of intellectual self-satisfaction and artistic hedonism; by any agency taken up with the salvation of sinners, it could never be considered fundamentally congenial.

We look back to the ten or twelve years following 480 B.C. We figure an old man who forty, or even fifty, years before was stirred by the Spirit of God to speak, briefly but repeatedly, on a certain subject. That crisis has long gone by; the poetic and mystical manner has also passed; in decade after decade, during which the high hopes of the Return epoch have settled down to a drab struggle with difficulty and disappointment, the prophet has watched, through prime and middle life, the weary battle against intrigue and hostility and the emergence of new problems and dangers. That his voice has never in all these years been heard, we need not suppose, but, like many others of whom even less is preserved to us than eight chapters, he has never felt conscious of the call to preface his utterance with: *Thus saith the Lord*. But now, in old age, he sees all round confusion of spirit and dark clouds big with dangers even graver than those of the past. He has much to gather from the past, as well as much to say of the present and of the future. Is it anything but natural that a great deal of his speech is far from clear to thinkers of two thousand years later? The most ingenious of these speculators have suggested nothing really convincing, despite their assumption of liberty to choose any group of dates that suit their fancy; are we not more, rather than less, rational, if we, accepting limitations which try others quite as severely as ourselves, see in the canonical assignation of these chapters a safer *terminus a quo* than unfettered fancy?

And now, amid the other clouds which darken the aged prophet's horizon, rises one which betokens grave political

danger to Israel's suzerain; and behind that political menace lie possibilities which may imperil Israel's spiritual health far more than the change of an overlord. May it not have been this vision which led the prophet to open his heart in response to the Spirit's impulse and so to give to his age the gathered fruits of his experience, observation and communion with God?

And among the glimpses of better things that brightened the lowering sky around him—the vision of the Shepherd who was “cut off, but not for Himself”, the peaceful King who should bring joy to the daughter of Zion—was it not timely and cheering for Zechariah, on the eve of his departure, to announce that in Zion the Lord of Hosts had, against all the threats or seductions of Javan, an arsenal rich in munitions, the sure victory of which evoked all the most splendid imagery of military triumph?

The matter for detailed examination is so manifold and intricate that nothing but a general survey of the question is worth attempting here. The arguments for unity adduced by the *Speaker's Commentary* have still real value; and a good summary will be found in J. H. Raven's *Old Testament Introduction*.

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