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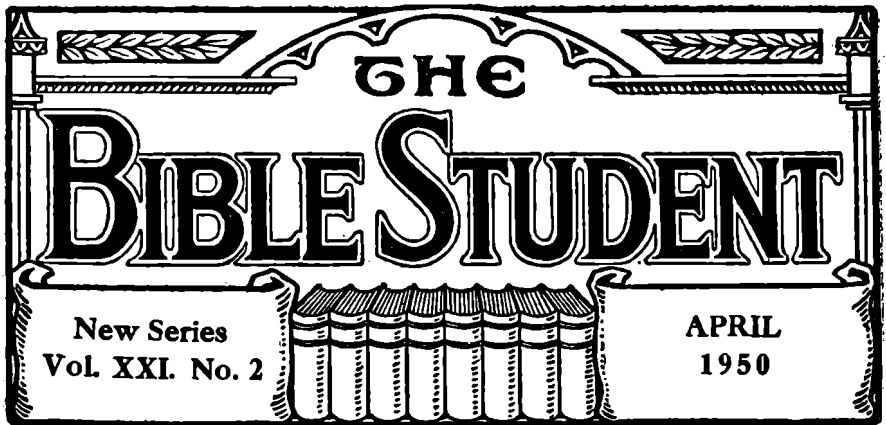
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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

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THE BIBLE'S ORIGINS

(Concluding Article)

It is worth mentioning for its practical interest that when our Authorised Version was produced in 1611, the Vatican MS (to which we referred in the last article) was inaccessible, the persons most capable of examining it being refused access to it. The Sinaitic MS had not been discovered, and the Alexandrian, which was presented to King Charles I by Cyril Lucar, Patriarch of Constantinople, did not reach London until 1628, too late to be of any service in preparing the English Version. Yet our translation is so accurate that the further light derived from these ancient MSS does not change a single doctrine or materially affect a single important issue. There are of course, and almost inevitably so in the nature of the case, what are called "Various Readings", differences in certain words and phrases, grammatical and otherwise. But we may safely trust the statement of Bishop Westcott when he says, "It cannot be repeated too often that the text of the N.T. surpasses all other texts in the antiquity, variety, and fulness of the evidence by which it is attested. About seven-eighths of the words are raised above all doubt by a unique combination of authorities. And of the questions which affect the remaining one-eighth, a great part are simply questions of order and form, and of such nature that serious doubt does not appear to touch more than one-sixtieth part of the whole text."

The second main source of help in arriving at an exact text is the *Versions*. The difference between manuscript and version is that the former are copies of the originals in the original tongue; versions are translations of these into other languages.

It is not possible to fix the precise date at which the Versions began to be made. Among the earliest and more important are the Targums, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, the Peshitta, and the Vulgate.

(1) *The Targums*. The word is really Aramaic, previously though erroneously called Chaldee, and means "translation", or a *paraphrased* translation. When the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity (about B.C. 580 possibly), they had largely forgotten the Hebrew tongue of their ancestors, and become accustomed to the speech of their Babylonian masters. It was therefore necessary for Ezra when reading the Law in public (Nehem. 8:8), not only to read in the ancient Hebrew but to

"give the sense" in the Aramaic so that they could understand what was read. Eventually this paraphrased translation was written down in a series of "Targums", and became in practice the popular 'Bible' of the Jewish nation. "In the form in which we now have them they represent a text current in Palestine before or about the first century B.C., but they did not reach their present shape until a much later date." The old Hebrew became almost exclusively the property of the educated. Whilst they do not contain literally the "original" text of the O.T. they are a great help for purposes of comparison.

It may be mentioned that based upon the Targums was the *Talmud*, which is really a commentary and explanation, in which quotations from the Jewish Scriptures are freely made, and these quotations are of value in assessing the textual accuracy of the O.T. The Talmud dates from about A.D. 270 to 500.

(2) *The Samaritan Pentateuch* is not really a version in the proper sense. The writing is in the *old* Hebrew characters not the square characters adopted by the Jews about the time of Alexander the Great. The actual date of the Nablus Roll is difficult to decide. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia favours 650 A.D. approximately. What is of practical interest and value is the fact that it represents the Hebrew text as it existed at the time of the disruption of the Northern Kingdom of Israel from that of Judah about B.C. 408. Its origin is traditionally traced back to the time when Manasseh (named by Josephus as the grandson of Eliasib the high-priest) set up the rival worship at Mount Gerizim for the alien Samaritans who were not allowed to take part in the rebuilding of the Temple under Nehemiah (cp. 2 Kings 17:24-41 and Neh. 13:23-30). This Manasseh is thought to have had with him a copy of the Hebrew Pentateuch. For the purposes of textual criticism it holds considerable value among such scholars as have swung away from the adverse criticisms it suffered at the hands of the Hebrew scholar Gesenius of a past generation.

(3) *The Septuagint*. This is a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. It is the most important version of the O.T., and the translation was probably begun under the patronage of Ptolemy about B.C. 285. It was recognised as the Bible of the Greek-speaking Jews and circulated in Palestine and Asia as well as in Egypt, the home of its origin. It kept alive the knowledge of God when the Hebrew language had fallen into

disuse. It was praised by the Fathers "as a token of the special providence of God; as a link in the Divine dispensation for the salvation of mankind." It was the Scriptures used by our Lord and His apostles, and by the early church. It took its name from the mythical story that the translation from the Hebrew was made by seventy—or, more exactly, seventy-two—elders, or scholars, by command of King Ptolemy Philadelphus (B.C. 285–246), who was urged by his librarian to obtain a copy of the Jewish Scriptures for his great library at Alexandria. The majority of the quotations from the O.T. in the New are taken from the Septuagint.

(4) *The Peshitta*. The date of this version is unknown—probably the second, or it may be the third, century. It is the most important of all the Syriac versions, and is known as the "Simple" version, but the exact explanation of the name is unknown. From internal evidence it is thought that the translators may have been Jewish Christians. Its date is about the beginning of the fifth century. It had a wide circulation at any rate from about that time all over the East, specially amongst all the numerous sects of the greatly divided Syrian Christianity. It did not contain all the books of the O.T. and N.T. until about the 5th century. The N.T. is "careful, faithful and literal, and the simplicity, directness and transparency of the style are admired by all Syriac scholars and have earned it the title of 'Queen of the Versions'" (T. Nicol).

(5) *The Vulgate*. In the year 385 A.D. one of the greatest Biblical scholars of his day, Eusebius Hieronymus, better known as Jerome, undertook the revision of the Latin Bible. This came to be known as the Vulgate (implying 'current' or 'common' use), and was the Bible of the Middle Ages. It is the official version of the R.C. Church. It has given us much of our modern theological terminology, and is the source for many Greek words which have enriched our theological conceptions. Its witness to the text of the O.T. has proved of primary importance in all translation work from the originals into English. For example Wycliffe's version was greatly influenced by the Vulgate, so also was Luther's version, and through this our own Authorised Version. But the order of the books in our English Version differs from the Vulgate and in the amount contained in some of them.

There are several other and later versions made at different

times and in different places which are interesting and valuable in varying degrees for ascertaining the text of the original Hebrew.

In regard to the origins of the New Testament we are on far more certain ground—or, as Kenyon puts it, “we pass from obscurity into a region of comparative light”. In fact our danger is rather “lest we should be confused by a multiplicity of illumination from different quarters”! It is generally accepted by all scholars that the books of the N.T. were written between the years 50 and 100 after Christ (Kenyon). Some think that parts of Christ’s teaching were in writing before the crucifixion, but this is conjectural. Nevertheless, before the first generation of Christians had passed away there were many narratives in circulation, as may be inferred from Luke (1:1-4), who wrote his Gospel about A.D. 57. Paul’s letters were in circulation by 66-67 A.D. Other N.T. books had emerged earlier. So that before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the N.T. in its several parts was very nearly, if not entirely, complete. The authenticity of the N.T. books is now so assured that no one questions it except those who are wilfully antagonistic. This does not mean that the last word has been said in the realm of textual criticism, which is a science that finds abundant scope in the honest search to get at the *exact* text. But the origins or ‘originals’ can be so much more intelligently traced than in past generations that we have no cause for refusing in any degree what we now have, even in our English translations, through the overruling providence of God.

Besides this, it is still probable that archaeology may yet discover for us treasures which will throw further light on both the Old and New Testament ‘originals’, as exemplified in the recent finds of ancient scrolls in Ain Fashka.* In 1940 such an eminent authority and scholar as Sir F. Kenyon wrote, “Archaeology has made no considerable contribution to the text of the Old Testament.” This still remains true, but it is of the greatest interest to read regarding these recent discoveries, which are in process of being expertly examined!

A.McD.R.

* The reader should refer in this connection to the article, “The Recent Finds in Palestine,” by F. F. Bruce, M.A. in last issue of “B.S.” pp. 43-46.