

# 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](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

THE  
CHURCHMAN

---

FEBRUARY, 1891.

---

ART. I.—“THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE BIBLE.”

*The Foundations of the Bible.* Studies in Old Testament Criticism. By  
R. B. GIRDLESTONE, M.A. Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1890.

CANON GIRDLESTONE'S new book has many qualities which call for hearty commendation. Although it is not intended to be an *eirenicon*, yet, if the author is conducting war, he conducts it with a rare and admirable freedom from asperity; exhibiting throughout an enviable familiarity with the many subjects which he has occasion to discuss, and a no less enviable power of selecting topics of importance, and explaining them with lucidity and method. The *Times* reviewer of “Lux Mundi” (November 13, 1890) already recognised that the articles in the *Record* out of which this book has grown were a contribution of no ordinary importance to a subject which since the publication of “Lux Mundi” has been more than ever on the public mind. The price of the book renders it accessible to all students, and its author has provided that all may read it with interest and profit.

Canon Girdlestone's position in relation to the criticism of the historical books of the Old Testament is stated on p. 193 as follows:

“We allow that Genesis is a compilation, and that the writers of the original materials from which it is composed may have presented the traditional information that came into their hands in different ways, with different names for God, and from different points of view; but we believe that all these variations were patriarchal, and that the book, as we now have it, is in the main as Moses and his immediate followers have left it. Again, we allow that there are different

"codes included in the legislation of the Pentateuch, but we believe that they were all delivered to Israel through Moses in various stages of the wilderness wanderings, and we see no reason, literary or otherwise, for regarding any of them as fabrications of a later age.

"Similarly we regard the Book of Joshua as a compilation, issued in all probability under the authorization of Phinehas and the elders of his time, and we believe that it presents an authoritative account of the way and degree in which God fulfilled the promises made to the patriarchs and to Israel. The rest of the historical books we take to be compilations from contemporary accounts, mainly from the work of prophetic writers, such as Samuel, the compilers themselves being persons whose authority must have been recognised when the books were issued, the final authorization of the whole being probably due to Ezra. This is the old traditional view, and to it we adhere."

The concessions here made to criticism are of such a nature that the author may well identify his view with the traditional view. His method is to show that each period presupposes what from the tradition we should expect it to presuppose; and then to apply to the tradition a variety of tests, topographical, linguistic and historical. At any rate, the line of defence here maintained is not of the kind which forces him who maintains it to ask whether he "have not a lie in his right hand." And since, as the author points out, such external evidence as has come to light "has all gone one way," there is good hope that many of his propositions may some day receive fuller confirmation than they now possess. Perhaps many who believe most confidently in the authors whom criticism has evolved, "the A, B and C of the Germans," would feel some surprise if the reality of their existence were confirmed from some external source. In the "Knights" of Aristophanes, a play acted in the year 424 B.C. (line 635), a speaker invokes a number of strange deities, all of them patrons of folly, among whom are the *Βερέσχεθου*, *Bereschethi*. Bothe, an editor of no great merit, but of some genius, says on that word (the import and origin of which are wholly unknown), *There was a time when I derived this word from the Hebrew Bereschith, and thought that the Jews were ridiculed as Bereschethi by the Babylonians and Persians, as people who were constantly repeating the word בְּרַשִׁית, with which their Pentateuch commences; and that a faint rumour of this usage having reached the Greeks, the foolish and superstitious were generally called Bereschethi.* This explanation, though in some details it may have to be modified, seems in the main quite satisfactory and convincing. Doubtless among the

400,000 slaves who worked in Athens at this time were some of those, or the descendants of some of those, whose exportation into “Javan” rouses the indignation of the Prophets. That, then, which in after-days was “foolishness to the Greeks,” is here for the first time ridiculed as a slavish superstition by the same poet who ridicules the deities of the Thracians and the Scythians. But if in the year 424 the first word of the Pentateuch was so familiar on Jewish lips that it could either serve as a nickname of the people or as the title of their religion, the document which contains that word cannot then have been very recent. The superior importance of positive evidence to negative, of authoritative tradition to hypotheses best calculated to explain the facts, will probably in the advance of criticism be more recognised than it is now.

Without, however, entering further into the critical questions involved in the “Foundations of the Bible,” the reviewer may call attention to some passages of special interest.

An argument sometimes urged by those who annul the distinction between false and true prophets, and reject the Israelites’ interpretation of their own history, is that it is against nature and experience that people should be so blind to their own interest, and so ungrateful, as the Israelites represent their ancestors to have been; and another argument closely connected with this, and urged against the antiquity of the law, is, that had the law existed it would have been obeyed; and that from the disregard of it which the historical books exhibit we may justly infer that it was not known. To the first of these an eminent German writer has replied that these matters cannot be settled *à priori*; that cases of children maintaining a course of ingratitude and disobedience towards affectionate parents are far from unknown; that what is true of individuals is not wholly impossible in a race. The second of the above arguments is interestingly dealt with by Canon Girdlestone in the following passage (p. 139):

“None of these things prove the non-existence of the law, but they reflect gross discredit on the priesthood; and they make it impossible for us to believe that the later priests could have invented any of the Pentateuch codes and attributed them to Moses, stamping thereby their own predecessors with everlasting disgrace.

“The case is somewhat, though not altogether, similar to that of the New Testament. Our Lord legislated for the future. A large part of His legislation—*e.g.*, the Sermon on the Mount—contemplated a state of things which we have never yet seen carried out. Much of the New Testament teaching was gradually ignored, and finally superseded by a

"debased religion. The finding of the Law by Hilkiah is like the reading of the Bible by Martin Luther, and a Reformation followed in each case, tending to bring men back to the study of earlier documents. It cannot be denied that the Mosaic legislation was practically, to a large extent, a failure, but theologically it gives us a hopeful ideal. The same is true of Christianity to some extent. The adherents of this religion of peace keep millions of soldiers ready for war, and the professed followers of One who impoverished Himself and sacrificed Himself accumulate wealth and live selfish, luxurious lives."

Peculiar interest attaches to chapters x. and xi., where cases are collected of notes which were added by readers to the original documents, and "are silent witnesses to the antiquity of the text on which they comment." The distinction between these and parentheses by original writers is pointed out by Canon Girdlestone (p. 66), but not sufficiently observed by him in his treatment of this subject; to the latter class rather than the former belong the theological notes (pp. 72-74), and even the interesting notice (p. 70) of Num. xiii. 22, that "Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt"—a note clearly addressed to persons who were acquainted with that date and used it as a standard. It may be added that the extremely irregular and arbitrary nature of these glosses (*e.g.*, in Gen. xiv., *Bela* is glossed both in verse 2 and verse 8, but *Emek hassidim* only in verse 3; in verse 14 the difficult word *הניכוי* is interpreted, but not *וירק*) seems strongly in favour of the author's opinion that they are the product of accident rather than of conscious editing.

We might have wished that the subject of the high places had received fuller treatment than the author allots it (pp. 146, 147), in consideration of the important place which the argument drawn from it occupies in the works of the school which this book is meant to answer; the notice of them, however, is interesting, and may be quoted in part:

"We must evidently draw a distinction between two classes of high places which originally existed side by side. The Patriarchs set up altars wherever they worshipped God, and probably they were on the hills, worship being then conducted in the open air. When Israel re-entered Canaan it would be natural that they should have numerous centres of worship, and that they should feel specially attached to the sacred places of their ancestors at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and elsewhere. But the Canaanites also had their altars and high-places, and the danger would be that Israel should worship at these, and so be led into adopting heathen rites. Accordingly the law ordered that all Canaanite high

"places should be destroyed, (Num. xxxiii. 52). But did it forbid all worship whatsoever except at one place? That would be a strange regulation. It is clear on the one hand that Moses predicts the establishment of a great religious centre where God's name should be specially honoured, and Solomon referred to this fact when he dedicated the Temple; but it is not equally clear that all local worship was forbidden."

The observations on the varieties of language employed in the Bible (chapters xxii.-xxiv.) will be found both temperate and prudent. It is interesting to observe that the question of the employment of different names of God has, with the progress of criticism, become one of secondary importance. This is not the only case in which the observation that gave rise to a series of inquiries has, in the course of those inquiries, had to be modified or abandoned. The value of this criterion becomes necessarily weakened as soon as it is supposed that the use of one or other name was not unconscious, but intentional. Moreover, the observations on p. 188 show us that the variation of the names of God was a matter in which the earlier scribes allowed themselves considerable licence—licence which all critics assume to be the explanation of certain phenomena, and of which the limits are wholly unknown. The analogy from the New Testament adduced on p. 156, perhaps not for the first time, will appeal to common-sense: "The comparative usage of Jesus and Christ in the New Testament affords a convenient analogy, and there is no more reason in the nature of things for dividing out the Book of Genesis amongst several writers according to their use of one or other name of God, than for parcelling out various sections of St. Paul's Epistles on a similar ground." When, however, the author observes (p. 158) that "Elohim sets forth God as the Putter-forth of force, whilst Jehovah sets Him forth as the Speaker to the spirit and the faithful Promiser," we may, at least, doubt whether the writers, each time they used these familiar names, were conscious of the attributes which each of them expresses.

There are a few points of detail on which some scholars may differ with the learned writer. Is there any ground for interpreting the name צפניה "God is darkness," seeing that the first part scarcely means "darkness" in Hebrew, and we know that "with Him is no darkness at all"? Surely the old interpretation, "whom God has preserved," or "may God preserve him," is more in accordance both with linguistic usage and with theology. We should fancy that the "peculiar term used for the engraving of signets, פתח" (p. 20) was clearly Egyptian; *phōth* (for *pōth*) is used regularly in the

Coptic Bible for "to engrave," and it is usual in such cases to regard the Egyptian word as the earlier form. In "the sixteen or eighteen corrections of the scribes" (p. 184), the number should rather have been left indefinite; Geiger's celebrated "Urschrift," although it needlessly and fancifully multiplied the number, nevertheless proved, even to sober judges, that this enumeration is imperfect. "*Azazel*, or the scapegoat" (p. 160), suggests an identity between the two, which it is not likely that the learned author would maintain. For the most part, however, the accuracy both of the statements and of the typography of this book leaves nothing to be desired.

D. S. MARGOLIOUTH.



## ART. II.—THE MARRIAGE LAWS.

THE condition of the laws relating to marriage has been complained of for many years past. The marriage laws of different parts of the United Kingdom differ from one another materially; and the differences often cause inconveniences; but it would lead us too far to discuss these. I shall limit myself in this paper to those laws which affect us of the Church of England only.

These need reform, as is admitted on all hands. The most complete information on the whole subject will be found in the Report of a Royal Commission bearing date 1868. That Commission was composed entirely of statesmen and lawyers—Mr. S. H. Walpole, Lord Chelmsford, Lord Hatherley, Lord Cairns, Lord Selborne, Dr. Travers Twiss being leading names. No ecclesiastic had a place on it. Since that date several projects of law have been framed for the purpose of giving effect to recommendations of the Royal Commission, the latest of them being a Bill drawn up by the Bishop of London, and discussed in both Convocations last spring; but as yet nothing has been done.

It is the requirements preliminary to marriage which seem to demand our first and special attention.

Marriages to be solemnized in church must be preceded by banns, by special license, by ordinary license, or by superintendent registrar's certificate. The special license is issued only by the Master of the Faculties of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Its effect is merely to set aside the usual restrictions as to residence and time and place of solemnization. It is a survival of the Papal times, for the Archbishop of Canter-