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# Notanda Biblica

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THE following brief notes, on but a small selection of texts, are suggestions—no more. Some will agree, some disagree, with the interpretations I venture to put forward in my humble attempt to elucidate certain difficulties in the passages referred to. May I hazard one hint? So far as possible, we should be on our guard in dealing with a book almost wholly written by Orientals. The *full* import of many a passage in the 'divine library' can be fully appreciated only by Oriental students who are familiar with the thought and idiom of the East. We have no right, in many places both in Old Testament and New Testament, to put a literal interpretation on sayings which are symbolic. Origen knew this, but carried his symbolic and allegorical views to obvious excesses. It may usefully be added here that the constantly repeated 'Thus saith the Lord' is a Hebrew idiom; it does not necessarily imply that God Himself is speaking. The meaning is rather: 'This I believe to be God's mind and will'.

## I

### OLD TESTAMENT

**Genesis i. 2.** Between the first and second verses there seems to be a gap. We might render 'the earth became desolate,' the implication being that some primeval catastrophe took place; for in Isaiah xlv. 18 we are told that God did not create the earth as a *tohu* (desolation).

**iii. 1.** In the narrative the serpent is not identified with Satan, who does not appear till after the Exile (so Driver). But this identification appears in Wisdom ii. 24.

**vi. 1-4.** Compare the comments of Augustine (*de civ. Dei*, xv 22-3): "I firmly believe that angels of God could never fall so, nor do I think that Peter alludes to them" (2 Peter ii. 4). The passage in Genesis is strange indeed, and was probably taken from the book of Enoch by the compiler: Bishop Ryle speaks of it as an ancient legend, long antecedent to that book. See chapter x in J. B. Mayor's edition of 2 Peter.

**vi. 5f.** The Flood story was once believed to indicate a universal deluge; but geologists have shown that this is an impossibility, and the old view is now abandoned (except by a few Fundamentalists). The narrative is a composite one; two main accounts being conflated, with additional matter from other sources.

**xi. 9. Babel, viz. Babylon.** The vast and lofty structure, called a ziggurat, was a pyramidal temple-tower, consisting of a series of diminishing platforms (were there seven of these?), not unlike the teokallis in ancient Mexico. The word 'Babel' is wrongly interpreted by the Editor of Genesis as 'confusion'; but it signifies 'house of God (*El*)'. Ruins of similar towers are still to be seen.

**xiv. Melchi-zedek,** the representative of a primitive revelation

combining priestly and kingly offices. See Westcott on Heb. vii. (add. note) and cf. Ps. cx. 4. *Salem* (Uru-Salim) is Jerusalem.

**xviii. 25.** Is not the meaning here 'Should not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (instead of 'shall')?

**xxviii. 12.** 'Ladder': so A.V. But the word implies a flight of steps, or rather ramps (something like those in a ziggurat) which Jacob saw in a dream. In v. 17 *dreadful* signifies what Otto calls 'numinous', viz., full of awe, i.e., of the divine presence.

**xxxii. 25.** For a commentary on this strange and mysterious incident consult Sir J. G. Frazer's *Folklore in Old Testament*, Vol. II, though the interpretation he puts forward is not convincing. Charles Wesley's noble hymn 'Wrestling Jacob' spiritualizes the incident.

**xix. 26.** Lot's wife. Our Lord reminds His hearers of this story, but, in so doing, does not guarantee its historicity, but the moral lesson to be taken from it. Just in the same way we might refer to some well known story in Shakespeare, without intending to assert more than that it did convey a moral. In pagan mythology we have a somewhat similar tale of Niobe, who was turned into stone by divine decree.

**Exodus vii. 13.** Pharaoh's heart hardened by *Jehovah*, so we read in x. 27 and elsewhere; but in vii. 13 (R.V.) the true statement is given 'Pharaoh's heart was hardened'. It was normal in Hebrew to refer things done by man to the direct operation of God Himself. There is a good note on this matter in Driver's *Exodus*, pp. 53, 54.

**xii. 37.** 'Six hundred thousand'; an incredible figure if taken literally. Perhaps used here as a round number for a very high figure. So we often speak of 'thousands' (even millions) when we mean a large number, never to be taken literally. Similarly in 1 Sam. vi. 19 where 50,070 men of Bethshemesh were represented as having been killed (by *Jehovah*) for tampering with the Ark—surely an impossible number.

**Joshua x. 12, 13.** The adjuration to sun and moon to stand still is obviously a poetical piece (taken from the book of *Jasher*), and, of course, not to be taken literally. Cf. Deborah's song: "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera". 'Jasher' was a popular song-book, probably late.

**Judges xiii-xvi.** The Samson Saga. There is a pleasant touch of comic relief in the story of Samson's escapades, which was no doubt popular among the Hebrews. For ancient parallels to the story, the reader should consult Sir J. G. Frazer's *Folklore in Old Testament*, vol. II, pp. 480f. Note that in Heb. xi. the emphasis falls securely on 'through *faith*'! Augustine (*de civ. Dei*) hazards the suggestion that Samson's self-destruction, along with the destruction of his enemies, may have been owing to some secret divine order.

**1 Chronicles xxi. 1.** '*Satan* stood up'; but, in Samuel David was moved by *God*. No doubt the Chronicler made this significant change of set purpose, as well he might, the primitive notion having given way to a newer and better conception. In any case it indicates the late date of Chronicles.

**Job xix. 25, 26.** We are so familiar with the noble music of the *Messiah* that we are apt to overlook the fact that the words used give

a completely wrong meaning in the A.V. The two verses may be paraphrased somewhat like this: 'I know that my vindicator (Goël) is living, and that, as my successor, he will appear on my behalf after my death; and though my body will decay, yet, apart from my flesh, I shall see God, whom I shall find on my side'. The Hebrew of v. 26 is corrupt; the LXX practically useless; the Vulgate quite wrong. Even the R.V. is unsatisfactory. No doctrine of bodily resurrection can be deduced from this much worried passage. Note that Job always insists on his own innocence, and that the *goël* was one whose duty it was to redeem a kinsman from bondage or to avenge his blood.

**Psalms.** Like our A. and M. Hymn-book, the Psalter contains material old and new. Divided into five books (each ending with a doxology) it has a certain correspondence with the five books of *Torah*. In its final form the contents must have received the editorial imprimatur at a very late period, as there are psalms obviously of the Maccabean age. The reader might usefully consult Canon Kennett's volume *Old Testament Essays*, and by way of a counterblast, Professor Robertson's Croall Lectures, *Poetry and Religion of the Psalms*, which moves rather on traditional lines.

**xxiii.** A good deal may be missed in our reading of this favourite psalm by not noting that it is a *travel* psalm. The writer is about to start on a long journey, but will full confidence in his Divine Guide, even though menaced by enemies. In v. 6 read, 'I shall return to the house of Jehovah' in safety; he is a citizen of Zion.

**ii.** I cannot but suppose that the two final verses are a late priestly adscript; they are completely out of harmony with vv. 16, 17. One of the greatest of the Penitential group of Psalms.

**c. 2.** '*. . . And not we ourselves*'; an unfortunate rendering. Read: 'we are not our own; we are *His* people'; the *His* is emphatic.

**cxvi. 1-2.** As these verses are generally punctuated, their true significance is obscured. Question marks should follow the first verse, thus: 'Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? from whence cometh my help?' (No help would come from the hills, the tops of which were crowned with idolatrous shrines. In the reformation work of the King (Josiah), these shrines had been abolished.) Then comes the triumphant reply to the question: '*My* help cometh from Jehovah Himself'.

**cxviii.** Here again I find the presence of adscripts in vv. 19-22. I may add here that psalm cix, a series of imprecations, has a decidedly un-Christian tone; attempts have been made to justify it, but the moral difficulty seems insurmountable. So, too, in cxxxvii (last part).

**Proverbs.** This collection of wise saws must, in its present form, be late; perhaps 6th century, but some portions later still. Oesterley's commentary should be consulted, and constant reference made to the Rev. Dr. Malan's wonderful three volumes for parallels in Eastern and other literature.

**xxx. 15.** The Hebrew has 'To Alukah belong two daughters, Give Give'. These female vampires are insatiable. But the presence of this line in the verse is highly doubtful; how did it get into the text? Cf. Oesterley, *Immortality and the Unseen World*, pp. 42 f.

**Isaiah vii. 14.** One of the most difficult verses in the prophecy. The

Hebrew for 'virgin' is *almah*, viz. a young woman of marriageable age. The traditional (Christian) view is that it directly predicts the birth of Jesus Christ. This historic event was not strictly the result of Isaiah's words; Matthew adduces them, it is true, but as a corroborative illustration. If this be so, one may regard the Greek  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  as consecutive (as it so often is), not final, expressing purpose.

**Daniel.** This famous book has unhappily proved to be, like the Apocalypse, the hunting ground of every species of faddist and crank—mainly, of course, in the latter half of it. And indeed the Visions are full of perplexities. The date of the book is variously disputed, but the now accredited view is that it was a production of the 2nd century B.C. Canon Driver's edition gives the fullest particulars, and to it the student is referred.

**xii. 4.** The late Professor Bevan, with an eye to the LXX, suggests this rendering: 'Many shall run to and fro, distractedly, and calamities will be increased'.

**Jonah.** This prophecy may be taken as one of the most 'Christian' writings in the Old Testament. It is not literal history, but abstract truth in the shape of an individualistic story. Our Lord's reference to it might be paraphrased thus: 'You remember the old story of Jonah; that is just an adumbration of what will be true in my own case'.

**ii.** The prayer is probably composed of passages taken from psalms written during the Exile.

**iii.** The judgment of God is conditional; repentance cancels the judgment.

## II

### NEW TESTAMENT

**Matthew ii. 15.** In the quotation from Hosea, the reference is clearly to an event in Israel's history; Matthew uses the words as aptly referring to Jesus. Here again  $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$  may be rendered 'so that' (consecutive) rather than 'in order that' (final).

**v. 28.** 'A woman,' i.e. a *married* woman. In v. 32 the words 'save for unchastity' seem to have been inserted (? by the first redactor of the Gospel, which originally must have been in Aramaic) to soften the apparent severity of the words as given in Mark x. 11. But note: our Lord was not given to accommodation to popular views; just as, at times, He spoke hyperbolically.

**vi. 13.** Though the Greek is quite definite 'lead us not,' the original words must surely have been 'suffer us not to be led'. Tertullian, Cyprian, and other ancient authorities agree. Cf. James i. 13 for apt corroboration.

**xvi. 18.** 'Thou art Peter.' I cannot be sure that these three words really were spoken by our Lord. In uncials the Greek  $\Sigma\Upsilon\epsilon\iota\pi\epsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$  may have replaced  $\Sigma\Upsilon\epsilon\iota\pi\alpha\varsigma$  (=thou hast said, i.e. 'Yes'). In any case one notes that the preponderating weight of Patristic evidence gives the true meaning, viz. 'on this rock of thy faith and confession'. Some scholars have suggested that vv. 17-19 are a late interpolation,

for the passage is not in Mark nor in Luke. The suggestion is an attractive one; but certainty on such a matter is not possible.

**xvii.** (*ad fin.*). No miracle here. The meaning is: 'catch a fish, take out the hook; you will find it can be sold for half-a-crown' (stater).

**Mark xiv. 72.** Both A.V. and R.V. are somewhat deficient here, for ἐπιβαλῶν is not accounted for. Render: 'Peter covered his face with his mantle and began to weep'. So Field's *Otium Norvicense*, xvi. 9-end. Despite Burgon, these 11 verses are an attempt to replace the lost original. The two oldest MSS. omit this passage; besides that, some twenty-one words are non-Markan. See W.H.'s *Greek Testament* for full details.

**Luke ii. 14.** A much disputed passage. I venture to keep the A.V. 'good will towards men,' reading εὐδοκία rather than εὐδοκίας. Dr. Field took the same view. Similarly in v. 49, I prefer the A.V. 'about my Father's business' to the R.V. 'in my Father's house'. Field's long discussion (in *Otium Norvicense*) seems conclusive.

**iv. 1-3.** The Temptation. The narrative can have come only from Jesus himself. Are we bound to regard it as literal history, or the dramatization of a spiritual experience? The latter, I think.

**viii. 24.** 'Rebuked.' Were wind and wave regarded as quasi-personal powers—demonic, in fact—which instantly obeyed our Lord's sharp rebuke? In the Apocalypse (vii. 1) angelic beings are introduced as holding in check the violence of the winds.

**x. 42.** Reading doubtful; but the meaning may be this: 'Martha, you need not worry to serve an elaborate meal; a single dish will suffice.'

**xxi. 19.** 'This do in remembrance of me.' Any attempt to render the verse as meaning 'sacrifice' is quite illegitimate. Tennyson's words in *Queen Mary*, sum up the truth: 'It is but a communion, not a mass; no sacrifice but a life-giving feast'.

**xxiv. 51.** 'And was carried up into heaven.' Omitted in most ancient MSS. "Luke," says Farrar, "is our sole authority for the ordinary conception of the Ascension," for we cannot quote Mark's words, as these occur in the inserted compendium.

**John i. 14.** 'Only begotten.' Max Müller once pointed out that the better and sufficient rendering is 'only'; but see the learned and elaborate discussion by Hort in his *Two Dissertations* (1876). The word, in Greek μονογενής, indicates the unique relationship of the Son to the Father in His divine nature (so Westcott).

**iii. 16.** An immortal text! But the words should be regarded not as actually spoken by our Lord Himself, but as an inspired assertion by the author of the Gospel. In any case they embody the central message of Christianity.

**x. 30.** 'I and my Father are one.' But note the neuter ἐν (not εἷς, masculine). The 'one (thing)' implies not a unity of essence, but an intimacy of communion. Cf. Tertullian, *adv. Praxean*, 25.

**Hebrews xii. 17.** Esau 'found no place of repentance.' So A.V. It is indeed a dreadful statement, and the R.V. brackets the words. But this seems needless, if the word for 'repentance' (μετανοία) is

rightly taken, viz. Esau found no room for a *change of mind* in his father.

**xiii. 10.** 'We have an altar.' Almost all good exegetes explain this word 'altar' as the Cross of Christ; and He Himself is the offering. See Westcott, ad loc.

**2 Peter.** This epistle is doubtless a pseudepigraph. We can agree with St. Jerome that we have Petrine thoughts embodied in this work; but its 2nd century date precludes any notion of Petrine authorship. See the convincing comments of the late Bishop Chase in his famous article in Hastings' *D.B.*

**1 John v. 8.** The verse about the Three Heavenly Witnesses, as Porson shewed long ago, is an interpolation, and Bentley was of the same opinion. Rightly rejected in R.V.

**The Apocalypse.** The date of this remarkable but obscure and baffling book is perhaps insoluble; some put it in Neronian times, others during the reign of Domitian. It may be that it was partly written at the earlier date, and then held over till it should be completed later. That its author was John the Apostle has been asserted by innumerable writers, though doubts of this were put forward by Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria in the middle of the 3rd century, who laid stress on the difference of language between the Apocalypse and the other Johannine writings (see Salmon, *Introduction to the New Testament*). Other critics flatly refuse to believe in the book's Apostolic authorship, as did Dionysius, and posit another John. Whatever view we take, of the book itself there can be no doubt: it was a *tract for the times*; but the underlying idea is this: Maranatha, the Lord is at hand. The writer was evidently steeped in Jewish Apocalyptic literature; the influence of 1 Enoch can hardly be missed. It is worth noting that Codex B (Vatican) does not contain the Apocalypse at all.

**vi. 6.** 'A penny.' This would look like plenty; but the penny means a denarius, now equal to about a shilling, but representing considerable purchasing power then. The image suggests days of famine.

**xiii-18.** 'Number of the beast.' 666 in Hebrew letters=Nero Kesar. In xi. 3 the two witnesses are probably Enoch and Elijah; and the great city is either Jerusalem or Rome (see Swete's note.).

**xx. 4, 6.** On these two texts alone Millennarianism rests. This doctrine was, formerly, widely held, despite the repudiation of it by such men as Origen and Augustine. But (as Swete says) the symbolism of the Apocalypse is opposed to a literal understanding of the Thousand Years. For the origin, development, and fading of this belief, see the article in Hastings' *D.B.*

**xxii. 18.** The speaker is Jesus Himself, not the author of the Apocalypse.

*The suggestions put forward in the above article are the responsibility of the author and should not necessarily be taken as representing the viewpoint of this journal.—Editor.*