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TEXT CRITICISM JUSTIFIED

WE may wonder whether Christian people pray as they should in behalf of Christian scholars. In textual criticism of the Old and New Testaments, we need scholarship, reverent, profound, wise and persevering. Dr. Caspar René Gregory in his *Canon and Text of the New Testament* concludes (pp. 527-8) by defending a proper criticism. "Those who decry textual criticism as dangerous and destructive, are usually not aware of the comparatively limited extent of the New Testament, which is subject to doubt." He quotes Hort's final judgment that the field covered by substantial variations "can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text." His last word is, "It is singular to see a man anxious to have the latest and best thing in electric lights, but totally indifferent as to having the best text in his New Testament." And as to the Old Testament (p. 25), he says that the Jews "not only were in the work of guarding their sacred books in those early times far superior to all other known peoples, but they at a later date and up to the present have proved themselves to be unsurpassed, unequalled preservers of tradition written and unwritten. The Christian Church owes them in this respect a great debt." Yet with all the compliments that we pay them, we learn from the Gospels that those same professional theologians instigated the diabolical persecution of the Son of God. Paul warns us (2 Cor. iii. 6) "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." And Calvin says that the meaning is, "that if the Word of God is simply uttered with the mouth, it is an occasion of death, and that it is *life-giving* only when it is received with the heart."

THE SEPTUAGINT

If we ascend the ladder of time to a period older than any existing manuscript, what recourse have we? There is that most ancient of all versions of the Old Testament, the Greek Septuagint, LXX, extant for more than two millenniums. Turretin in his *Theology* (Loc. II, Q. XIV, 5) observes that it was in common use by the Greek and the Latin Church for six hundred years. Dr. W. H. Green in his *General Introduction to the Old Testament, The Text* (pp. 87-9) says, "The different books

indicate a great diversity in the character and ability of the translators. . . . There are numerous instances of mistranslation due to ignorance or negligence or perhaps inaccuracies or defacements of the manuscript used by the translator. . . . The Christians, into whose hands it passed from the Jews, received it with the same veneration that was felt for it by the latter. But as the Christians drew their weapons from this version in their controversies with the Jews, the latter fell back upon the original Hebrew, and insisted upon the discrepancies between it and the LXX ; and their former favourable opinion of this version was changed into a settled detestation. The Christians charged the Jews with corrupting the text of Scripture, because they did not receive the rendering of the LXX ; the Jews retorted the charge upon the Christians, because they did."

THE METHOD

In 1928 a volume appeared, *An Aid to the Textual Amendment of the Old Testament* by James Kennedy, D.D., edited after his death by his friend N. Levison, B.D. It was printed in Palestine, and abounds in misprints, Hebrew, Greek and English, and, in one instance, in Latin. The long list of errata would be longer if it were completed. This book of O.T. criticism itself needs criticism and amendment. In gleaning from the pages a series of readings from the LXX which differ from the Massoretic Hebrew, these may serve to illustrate the method of using the LXX in textual criticism, and need not be taken as arguments that they should be substituted for the readings in our Bibles, which are based on the present Hebrew text. This method has its fascinations and its perils ; and other scholars have employed it. The late Dr. Robert Dick Wilson, latterly of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pa., in conversation told the writer that he had found a number of possible emendations suggested by the LXX. Dr. Kennedy has a multitude of other emendations, showing many alterations that could be suggested by changing or adding Hebrew letters, but surely any emendation to the work of the Massorettes should not be made merely to please a critic. This book makes free comparisons between Hebrew letters and those of ancient Semitic alphabets. The LXX rendering often represents a Hebrew word that differs from that written by the Massorettes, by only one or two letters. And as those Hebrew readings are

centuries older than our oldest manuscripts, they deserve attention for their antiquity. Letters that are similar in form, or similar in sound might be confused by translators.

INSPIRATION

The orthodox doctrine of the inspired, inerrant original of Scripture has often been misrepresented or caricatured. But in its correct formulation, it does not affirm the inspiration of copyists, translators, interpreters, printers or critics, and certainly does not approve the subjectivity of critics, ancient or modern, however ingenious they may be. All language is verbal, and, if it is inspired at all, it would seem to require a verbal inspiration. Note the argument of the Apostle Paul (Gal. iii. 16) citing from Gen. xiii. 15 and xvii. 8, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." This difference between singular and plural in the original turns upon the letter yodh, corresponding to the Greek iota, the origin of the English word jot; and it is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. If we believe that it was by divine inspiration and care that this small letter was omitted, is it difficult to believe that the remaining letters of that Hebrew word were placed there by divine inspiration? And all scholars must agree that the Westminster Confession (Chap. I, 8) is correct in its statement that the original Scriptures through the singular care and providence of God have been kept pure in all ages; so that they can be the final resort in controversy. Critical discussions, truly important, do not affect any Christian doctrine. It has been proved that John Calvin believed in an inspired, inerrant Bible; but that left him free to discuss any problem of text criticism, with the best material then available, including the LXX and Jerome's Latin Vulgate.

LXX AND A.V.

In some instances, it is interesting to note that a rendering of the LXX has passed into our Bibles in preference to the word written in the Massoretic Hebrew text. In the context of 2 Sam. iii. 18 Abner exhorts the elders of Israel to make David king, "for the Lord hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel". Here "I will save" is the rendering of the LXX, founded upon a change of

vowel letters ; and it has been preferred in the A.V., the English Revised Version, ERV, and the American Revised Version, ARV. And the Vulgate has “salvabo”.

We might suppose another instance in Ps. viii. 5 : “Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels”, where the ERV and ARV have “but little lower than God”. Dr. Kennedy shows that by a change of Hebrew consonants in the word “Elohim”, the LXX reading is “than the angels”. Here it would seem, however, that the translators of the A.V. interpret the word “Elohim” as meaning “angels”.

Dr. Kennedy finds an instance also in Jer. xviii. 17, where the Massoretic vowel points do not agree with the LXX rendering, or the difference is only in one vowel. The ERV gives a literal translation, “I will look upon their back and not their face”, and places in the margin the phrase of the A.V. and the ARV, “I will show them the back”. “I will show” is the LXX rendering ; and if this is a correct statement, it is a case where the LXX has been preferred to the record of the Massorettes. Here, too, Jerome’s Vulgate agrees with the LXX.

It is an indication of accurate printing, that the single dot which is all that distinguishes the Hebrew letter *s* from *sb*, is rarely misplaced in our Hebrew Bibles. And this book of criticism quotes a verse, Is. xix. 13, “The princes of Noph are deceived”, where the LXX translators read the other Hebrew sibilant, and rendered, “they are lifted up”. This illustrates the importance of that dot.

VOWEL POINTS

Davis’ *Bible Dictionary* states that the vowel points were introduced by the Massorettes not earlier than the sixth century A.D. The simplest of LXX variations, accordingly, is one due to a change of vocalization, or vowel points, and where the Hebrew consonants of the Massorettes are left intact. In Jer. ii. 34, A.V. (also ARV margin) we read, “I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these”. The ERV has, “I have not found it at the place of breaking in, but upon all these”; and in the margin, for “all these” it says, “Some authorities have ‘every oak’” (the LXX rendering). But the Hebrew words “these” and “oak” differ in vowel points.

Another difference due to vowel points only, is Jer. xxxi. 13 (LXX xxxviii. 13), “Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance,

both young men and old together". For "together" the LXX repeats the first verb (plural) "shall rejoice".

Another instance is in Nah. iii. 8, where Jerome's Vulgate agrees with the LXX. "Populous" No, or No-Amon, had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, or as the ERV and ARV margins note, the Nile, and her wall was "from the sea" (A.V.), or, as ERV and ARV read, "of the sea". Here the ERV margin for "was of the sea", says, "Some ancient versions have 'was the waters,' which is the LXX reading, "Water (was) her wall", that is of defence. Again, "waters" and "of the sea" or "from the sea", differ only in vowels.

ONE LETTER ONLY

With the aid of this book of criticism, let us now observe a group of LXX variant readings, explained by a difference of one letter from the text of the Massorettes.

Deut. xvi. 5, "Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates", where the LXX reads, "any of thy cities", due to the omission of one Hebrew letter.

1 Sam. xiv. 9, as Jonathan and his armour-bearer were about to discover themselves to the Philistines, he said, "If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them." The LXX reads, "Stand there until we tell you", instead of "until we come to you".

. In Ps. xxviii. 8, "The Lord is their strength", the ERV margin says, "According to some ancient versions, 'a strength unto his people.'" Here Dr. Kennedy shows that the LXX translators or their Hebrew manuscript added a consonant to the word translated "their", with the meaning, "unto his people".

In Ps. lx. 4 (Heb. lx. 6; LXX lix. 6), the A.V. reads, "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth." The ERV in the last clause, adds, in the margin, "Many ancient authorities render, 'That they may flee from before the bow.'" That is from the LXX, which seems to substitute for the Massoretic word "truth", the word "bow", by changing one of the dental letters for another at the end of the word. Perowne discusses the verse, and prefers the word of the LXX for our Hebrew text; and so does the Vulgate.

Ps. lxxii. 14 (LXX lxxi. 14), "precious shall their blood be in his sight". The LXX has "precious shall their name be". Ps. lxxv. 9 (Heb. lxxv. 10; LXX lxxiv. 10), "I will declare for ever". LXX, "I will rejoice for ever". Prov. i. 26-7, "I will mock when your fear cometh". LXX, "when your disaster cometh". Amos ix. 2, "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them." LXX, "Though they hide themselves in hell." Zech. x. 12, "they shall walk up and down in his name". LXX, "they shall glory in his name".

TWO OR MORE LETTERS

Passing from this group of LXX readings, each apparently due to a change in one Hebrew consonant, let us observe another series which may be accounted for by alterations of two or more Hebrew consonants.

Num. xxiv. 17, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob"; LXX, "There ariseth a Star." 1 Sam. v. 3, where the Philistines "took" Dagon their idol which was fallen down before the ark of the Lord, and restored it to its place; here the LXX instead of "took" has "and they raised up". And these renderings are reversed in Amos ii. 11, "I raised up of your sons for prophets"; while the LXX has "I took of your sons for prophets."

Job xv. 25, "he stretcheth out his hand against God"; LXX, "he lifteth up his hand". Ps. xxxvii. 35 (LXX xxxvi. 35), A.V., "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree"; ERV and ARV, "like a green tree in its native soil"; LXX and Vulgate (xxxvi. 35), "like the cedars of Lebanon". Ps. xcvi. 11 (LXX xlvi. 11), "Light is sown for the righteous"; LXX, "Light ariseth for the righteous."

Isa. xlii. 4, "the isles shall wait for his law"; for "the isles", the LXX reads, "the nations". Jer. xiv. 9, A.V. and ERV, "Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied"; ARV, "as a man affrighted"; LXX, "as a man sleeping".

Jer. xli. 9 (LXX xlvi. 9), "Now the pit wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men, whom he had slain because of Gedaliah", or as the margin has it, "by the hand, or by the side of Gedaliah"; the LXX by a change of consonants, instead of "by the side of Gedaliah", reads, "it was a vast pit".

SCHOLARSHIP NEEDED

A discussion of this subject indicates our need of more Christian scholarship in textual criticism ; and not only so, it is needed in other directions. Sir Charles Marston's admirable book, *New Bible Evidence*, shows many confirmations of the Scripture from recent discoveries in archaeology ; and demonstrates the folly and shame of the so-called Higher Criticism, where one brazen assertion after another has been destroyed. He pleads for the decipherment of the many tablets discovered (p. 40) and says, "The world possesses far too few scholars for this class of work." The prophet's word might be taken as a challenge to American scholars (Is. xxix. 12) if we take Dr. J. A. Alexander's rendering, "And the writing is given to one who knows not writing, saying, Pray read this, and he says, I know not writing."

For the great mass of readers, the ancient Hebrew readings suggested by passages where the LXX Version varies from Hebrew Bibles, are practically inaccessible. Whereas, a great body of alternate readings, the Q'ri and K'thibh, are given in Hebrew Bibles, and without inordinately increasing the size of the volumes. Could not all the most important of LXX variations be made as accessible in editions of the Bible, and without making such books unwieldy ? Such a list of LXX Hebrew readings might in part reproduce a Hebrew manuscript as used by LXX translators, and they deserve attention. If groups of scholars arrange details, they might prepare such a list of Hebrew readings from the LXX in a comparatively brief time, and "ad majorem Dei gloriam".

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