

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 Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

copies which preserved the original address, and a great church identified with the letter by its living tradition ; in the case of Hebrews, one at least, if not both, of these factors preservative of the original historical conditions, was on our theory absent. Here, then, as in other respects, such a theory¹ serves to clear up the mystery which is generally felt to hang over this great memorial of the later Apostolic Age, this witness to an interpretation of the Gospel of Christ not otherwise made explicit in its surviving literature.

VERNON BARTLET.

*OUR LORD'S REFUTATION OF THE
SADDUCEES.*

To fully grasp the force of our Lord's argument we have only to remember that He was a Jew speaking to Jews ; and that his argument was addressed to the Sadducees, who denied not only a bodily resurrection, but also any continued existence after death. It was, therefore, only necessary for Christ to show that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still in existence long after their death. Difficulties have been introduced into the exegesis and a simple and logical argument has been rendered obscure and doubtful by forgetting these simple rules and by endeavouring to make our Lord's argument prove more than it fairly does, and more than was required to confute His opponents.

The force of the reasoning was already fully grasped by Origen, and recently has been clearly stated by Professor

¹ The present writer trusts he will not be thought to be exaggerating the importance of his own views, if he expresses the earnest hope that some competent scholar will take the trouble to point out any fatal objections to them, if such there be. After a certain amount of thinking on given lines, one loses the full sense of much to which they may do less than justice ; and only a fresh mind can here help by more searching, while yet sympathetic, criticism.

Swete : " In this place God reveals Himself as standing in a real relation to men who were long dead. But the living God cannot be in relation with any who have ceased to exist ; therefore the patriarchs were still living in His sight at the time of the Exodus."

Indeed, the argument is so lucid and logical that Meyer is able to express it in the form of a syllogism.

Major premise : God is the God of the living and not of the dead.

Minor : He calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Conclusion : Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living and not dead.

The reading is absolutely unanswerable, and so the Sadducees found it. They could not dispute either of the premises, and thus were unable to avoid the conclusion.

It must, however, be noticed that the argument entirely depends on the fact that the time expressed in the minor premise is present and not past. If the time is changed, the conclusion is entirely altered.

Major premise : God is the God of the living and not of the dead.

Minor : He was at one time God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Conclusion : Therefore at that time Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still living and not yet dead.

The reasoning is quite correct, but, regarded as a refutation of the Sadducees, the argument altogether breaks down. It merely proves the earthly existence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not that they were still alive when God spoke to Moses.

Unfortunately we cannot derive this present time from the tense employed ; for neither in the original Hebrew, nor in the LXX. of Exodus, nor in the Greek of St. Mark and St. Luke, nor in the Chaldee vernacular spoken by our Lord is

any verb employed at all. Accordingly such comments as those of Chrysostom and Theophylact, which make the argument depend on the use of the present tense—*οὐ γὰρ εἶπεν, Ἡμῶν, ἀλλ' εἰμί*—must at once be set on one side.

It is none the less to be regretted that the knowledge of this fact has led commentators in general to abandon the attempt to base the argument on the time denoted by the sentence and to resort to more or less devious methods of establishing our Lord's position. Thus Professor Denney writes: "Jesus does not argue from the tenses, like a grammarian, but from the spiritual relations involved in the case. . . . The goodness and faithfulness of our Creator, the value of our human life to Him, it is there that the promise lies. This line of thought is most spiritual, but it would have been beyond the power of the Sadducees to think it out on the spur of the moment; nor is it at all certain that they would have accepted it without cavil.

Pearson deduces the continued existence of the patriarchs from the fact that they did not receive the promises during their lifetime, and therefore must have obtained them later. It may, however, be doubted if the Sadducees would have been silenced by such reasoning. They would have replied that the promise to give the patriarchs "the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers," was fulfilled when the Israelites obtained possession of Palestine. Indeed, this view is actually taken in several passages of the Old Testament.

Most commentators think that the argument turns on the use of the word "God," but it is extremely difficult to see in what way the fact that Jehovah was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob involves the immortality of these patriarchs. The phrase certainly suggests that their relation to God was peculiar, but that might well have been the case, even though it was limited to their lifetime. Moreover,

though it is true that the term "God" is relative, so is the term "Creator," and both words emphasize the unlikeness rather than the likeness between God and men. It would be inadmissible to argue that all men are immortal because God is so, or to assume that the present relation between Creator and creature will continue for ever. The phrase "I was the God of Abraham" can scarcely be said to assert anything about him at the present time.

Mr. Twistleton, realizing that such arguments are far from conclusive, is driven to dispute the validity of our Lord's reasoning: "Indeed, it must be deemed probable that the Sadducees, as they did not acknowledge the divine authority of Christ, denied even the logical validity of the inference, and argued that the expression that Jehovah was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob did not necessarily mean more than that Jehovah had been the God of these patriarchs while they lived on earth, without conveying a suggestion, one way or another, as to whether they were or were not still living elsewhere." Considered as criticism of the arguments before him, these strictures are amply justified; but when we have reached the point of criticizing our Lord's reasoning, it is well to consider if we have properly understood it.

No verb was employed by our Lord, for no verb was needed. Our Lord was a Jew, and thought as a Jew, and was speaking to those who were also Jews. Whether He quoted the original Hebrew of the passage in Exodus, or cited it in the Aramaic vernacular, the sentence denoted present time to Him and His hearers, just as surely as the words "I *am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" do to us. The only difference is, that in English the *presence* of some verb is required to make this clear, whereas in the Semitic languages the *absence* of any verb effected the same purpose. If the sense in-

tended had been "I *was* the God," it would have been necessary, either to employ the verb הִיְיָ or else to insert such a phrase as בִּימֵי קֶדֶם to indicate that the relation no longer existed. "I, the Preacher, King over Israel in Jerusalem," would mean, unless there was some assertion to the contrary, that he was still reigning, just as, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon," does. Accordingly in the Hebrew of Ecclesiastes the verb is inserted: "I, the Preacher, was King." A Jew would have as little thought of disputing our Lord's assumption as an Englishman would think of asserting that the sentence "I *am* the God of Abraham" could by any possibility refer to past time. But while our Lord's argument is convincing and unanswerable, we must be on our guard against distorting it by attempting to make it establish conclusions which do not legitimately follow from the premises. These premises certainly establish the continued existence of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they do not necessarily prove that their bodies will rise again at the Last Day. Indeed there was no reason why Christ should complicate His argument by introducing the question of a future resurrection. We must not forget that the Sadducees denied not only the resurrection of the body but also the continued existence of the soul. On this point our authorities are so early and unanimous that there is no reasonable ground for disputing their testimony.

St. Luke¹ is quite clear: "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel,² nor spirit." Josephus³ is equally definite: "The doctrine of the Sadducees is this. . . . That souls die with the bodies, nor do they regard the observation of anything but what the Law⁴ enjoins

¹ Acts xxiii. 8.

² Hofmann (*Der heil. Schrift N. T.*, viii. i. p. 484) notices that this gives especial point to the statement of our Lord ἰσαγγελοι γὰρ εἰσιν.

³ *Ant.* xviii. 1, 4.

⁴ Cornelius à Lapide makes the valuable suggestion that from a

them." And again: "The Sadducees¹ are those who compose the second order and take away fate entirely. . . . They take away also the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades." These statements are confirmed by the Talmud²: "When the Sadducees fell into the error that there was only one world."

Accordingly, for their refutation, our Saviour only needed to show quite generally that the Law proved the continued existence of men after death. If we remember this limitation of the argument, the reasoning is clear and unassailable. But if we endeavour to deduce the resurrection of the body from the statement in Exodus, we make our Lord prove more than was required, and once more involve ourselves in doubtful arguments and uncertain deductions.

There is no need to specify the various methods by which our Lord's reasoning has been forced to establish the resurrection of the body. It may at once be said of all such deductions that, however plausible they may appear to their authors, they cannot be legitimately derived from the statement of God to Moses. Indeed it is one of the penalties of such exegesis that it tends to throw doubt on the continued existence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When God spoke to Moses, the resurrection of the patriarchs was not an actual fact, but only a possibility. Accordingly, if we make their life after death depend on their resurrection, we cannot argue that they were still alive at the time of the Exodus. Grotius, indeed, feels the force of this objection so strongly that he considers they were not actually, but only potentially, alive. "*Solutio objectionis tacitae. Atqui mortui tunc erant. Sane; sed vivunt*

mistaken explanation of this statement there arose the opinion that the Sadducees only accepted the Law as authoritative. Herzfeld thinks the Sadducees have been confused with the Samaritans.

¹ *Bell. Jud.*, ii. 8. 14.

² *Berachoth* 54a.

quoad Dei potentiam, quae potest mortuos vitae meliori reddere.”

Chrysostom equally speaks of their life as something still future. ὡσπερ γὰρ ὁ Ἀδάμ, εἰ καὶ ἔζη τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἣ ἔφαγεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου, ἀπέθανε τῇ ἀποφάσει· οὕτω καὶ οὗτοι, εἰ καὶ ἐτεθνήσκεσαν, ἔζων τῇ ὑποσχέσει τῆς ἀναστάσεως. It was a promise of life rather than life itself.

In any case, if this were our Lord's meaning, the passage in Exodus would afford no proof that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive or that they any longer exist. Such explanations as these, which begin by making Christ's reasoning establish more than it fairly does, end by making it prove nothing at all.

But while we deny that our Lord's argument can by any ingenuity be made to prove the resurrection of the body, we realize that by life He meant no mere continued existence, but life in fellowship with God. An existence, removed from God's presence and outside His providence, would have been regarded both by Christ and His hearers, not as life but as death. Our Lord's reasoning shows conclusively that this cannot be the lot of the righteous. They are raised from Hades¹ and rescued from death. Their life is no joyless existence, but life in communion with God.

H. H. B. AYLES.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH.

WHEN we speak of the presence of Christ it is well to avoid confusion of thought by asking ourselves, What is the sphere or department of being in which we at the moment conceive His presence to exist or operate? Is it the universe, or the Church, or the soul of man?

As the Eternal Word or Reason of God, Christ is immanent in nature: "In Him all things hold together"

¹ Contrast Job vii. 9, Isaiah xxvi. 14.